SUNDAY
March 24, 2024

BENGALURU
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ON SUNDAY
INDIA'S NATIONAL NEWSPAPER SINCE 1878

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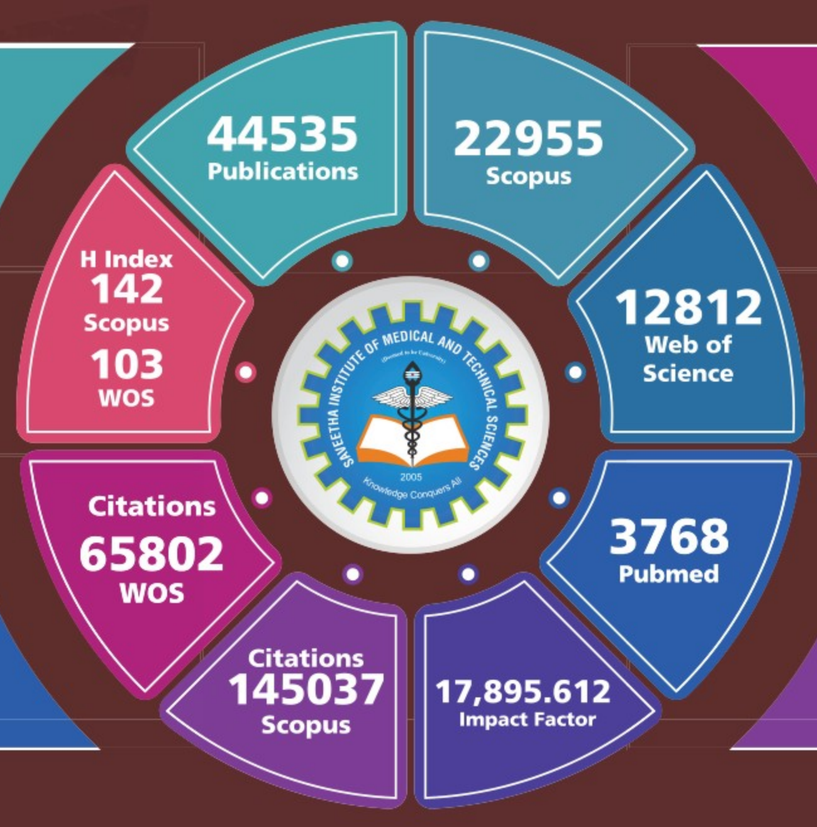

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13 WORLD RANK QS WORLD UNIVERSITY RANKINGS by subject DENTISTRY
nirf 13th RANK (By MHRD, Govt. of India) Among All IITs, IIMs, Central, State, Private & Deemed Universities in India
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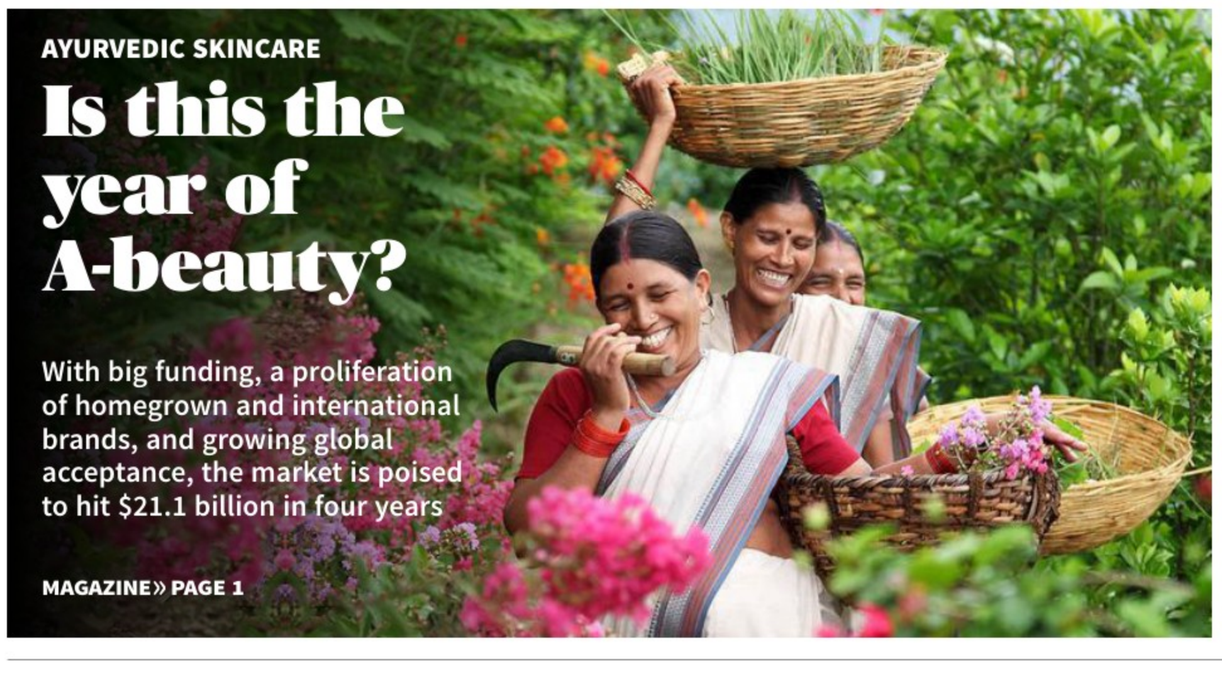
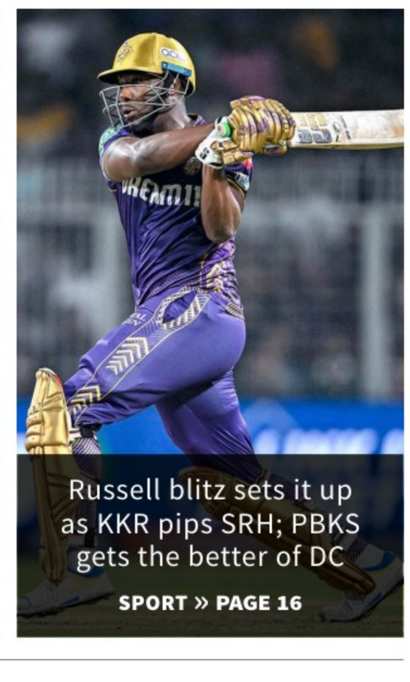

AYURVEDIC SKINCARE
Is this the year of A-beauty?
With big funding, a proliferation of homegrown and international brands, and growing global acceptance, the market is poised to hit $21.1 billion in four years
MAGAZINE» PAGE 1



BJP made 'bribes' legal via poll bonds: Congress

Party accuses the BJP of using electoral bonds in four 'patterns of corruption', including 'prepaid, postpaid, and post-raid bribes'; it reiterates demand for an SC-monitored probe into the scheme

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Alleging that the electoral bond scheme ensured that "prepaid, postpaid, and post-raid bribes" could be routed through regular banking channels, the Congress on Saturday reiterated its demand for a Supreme Court-monitored investigation into the scheme.

Addressing a press conference at party headquarters, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said that an analysis of recently published State Bank of India (SBI) data has revealed that 38 corporate groups received 179 government contracts and projects worth ₹3.8 lakh crore after donating electoral bonds to the BJP.

Using a Python code on the SBI data, the Congress matched donations with the political parties who received them, he said.

Grave charges

Here are the Congress's allegations over the links between electoral bonds donated to the BJP by corporates, and the awarding of government contracts and projects

- Thirty-eight corporate groups made donations to the BJP and received a combined total of 179 major government contracts and project approvals worth ₹3.8 lakh crore. In all, these groups donated ₹2,004 crore to the party
- Forty-one corporates that faced 56 ED/CBI/I-T searches had given ₹2,592 crore to the BJP. Out of this, ₹1,853 crore was given after the raids
- Sixteen shell companies donated ₹419 crore to the BJP

They [the BJP] cannot make minimum support price a legal guarantee for farmers but have made bribes a legal affair
JAIRAM RAMESH
Congress general secretary

"They [the BJP] cannot make minimum support price (MSP) a legal guarantee for farmers but have made bribes a legal affair," Mr. Ramesh said.

Corruption patterns

He identified four patterns of "blatant corruption" in the electoral bonds scheme: *Chanda Do, Dhanda Lo* [Pay donation, get business] or prepaid bribes; *Theka Lo, Rishvat Do* [Bag contracts and pay bribes] or postpaid bribes; *Hafta Vasooli* [Extortion] or post-raid bribes; and lastly, Farzi companies, or shell companies.

Mr. Ramesh alleged that under the 'prepaid scheme', ₹551 crore was given to the BJP in donations; within three months, contracts and projects worth ₹1.32 lakh crore were given to the donors by the Union government and BJP-ruled State governments.

Under the 'post-paid' category, he alleged that ₹62,000 crore worth of projects were given by the Centre or BJP State governments; within three months of approvals or contracts being signed, these firms paid ₹580 crore through electoral bonds.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 8

Bonds linked to project clearances by BRS govt.

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The purchase of electoral bonds and subsequent encashment by the then ruling party in Telangana, the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), seemed to be closely linked to the award of contracts and opening of new units by donor companies, if the report submitted to the EC is to be believed.

In Telangana, the BRS encashed the bonds donated by IRB Infra, purchased a few weeks after the Outer Ring Road contract was awarded to the company.

CONTINUED ON » PAGE 8

133 killed in Moscow concert hall shooting; 11 detained, says Putin

Associated Press
MOSCOW

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Saturday that authorities have detained 11 people in the attack on a suburban Moscow concert hall that killed at least 133 people.

In an address to the nation, Mr. Putin called it "a bloody, barbaric terrorist act" and said all four people who were directly involved had been taken into custody. The Islamic State group's Afghanistan branch claimed responsibility for Friday's attack in a statement posted on affiliated channels on social media. A U.S. intelligence official said U.S. agencies had confirmed that the group was responsible for the attack. Videos posted online showed gunmen shooting civilians at point-blank range. The attack, which was the deadliest in Russia in years, came just days after Mr. Putin cemented his grip on power in an electoral landslide.

Images shared by Russian state media Saturday showed a fleet of emergency vehicles gathered outside the ruins of Crocus City Hall, which had a maximum capacity of more than 6,000 people.

KYIV DENIES ROLE » PAGE 11

NEARBY

Companies say status quo on work from home

BENGALURU

Ever since Bengaluru started feeling the pinch about the water situation, demand for work from home (WFH) has almost overtaken calls for conservation efforts and other long-term solutions. However, a cross-section of companies *The Hindu* spoke to said they would only think of going back to complete remote work if the situation demands it. » Page 2

CLASSIFIEDS » PAGE J2
MAGAZINE » 8 PAGES

State takes Centre to apex court over drought relief

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Drought-hit Karnataka on Saturday filed a petition in the Supreme Court against the Union government over delay in sanctioning relief to the State, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said.

Speaking to reporters, he said the Centre has not released funds even five months after a Central team had visited Karnataka to review the situation and submitted its report on the drought condition here.

"Today, we have filed a writ petition under Article 32 with the Supreme Court against the Centre, seeking the release of the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF)," the Congress Chief Minister said. A total 223 out of 236 taluks in Karnataka are notified as drought-affected, with severe shortage of drinking water in many places, while water for irrigation has been stopped.

FULL REPORT » PAGE 6

Myriad hues for Holi in a non-toxic way

Colours extracted from indigenous plant species were found to be 100% safe

Rahul Karmakar
GUWAHATI

Experiments at a chemical laboratory in Nagaland have yielded a new range of non-toxic colours made from indigenous plants, offering Holi revellers a safe alternative to chemical-laced pigments.

The "benign" powdered hues, made from edible items such as mustard leaves, coriander, spinach, beetroot, mulberry, turmeric, rose, hibiscus, carrot, and rhododendron, were developed by the Corrosion and Electrochemistry Research Group (CERG) of Nagaland University's Department of Chemistry.

The eco-friendly colours can have several applications beyond the festival, and could potentially fuel small-scale industries in the geographically challenged State, the group's researchers said.

The team of researchers with herbal colours. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

"We started working on extracting the colours from indigenous plants in time for Holi to demonstrate their safety," Ambrish Singh, who headed the project, told *The Hindu*.

He said they studied the market and found there was enough space for natural colours as those available cause nausea, headache, itching, and skin irritation.

The research scholars at CERG - Therola Sangtam, Limasenla Longkumer, Vetezo Venuh, Akhiu Y. Yimchunger, and Vilabeilie Rutsa - shortlisted the plants, fruits, and flowers for the team to work on.

Plant extracts

"The extracts were prepared and mixed slowly in several steps with starch and cornflour and then kept for drying at an optimum temperature. More extracts were added after the moisture evaporated and the mixture was ground thoroughly," Prof. Singh said.

After removing any dust contamination, the powder was filtered several times to ensure that the particles were of the same size.

The final product was tested and applied over the skin, the researchers said. The colours were found to be 100% safe.

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Bustling crowd: A large number of devotees gather for the Masaan Holi celebration at Manikarnika Ghat.

Holy revelry: Devotees are seen singing and dancing during the celebration.

Fiery devotion: Devotees dress up for a procession as part of the Masaan Holi celebration in Varanasi.

Shashi Shekhar Kashyap
shashi.shekhar@thehindu.co.in

Rising from the ashes

Masaan Holi is marked by revelry with coloured powder but it is also unique for its celebration of death; hundreds of devotees gather to dance, sing and chant in Varanasi

Masaan Holi, a two-day event on different ghats of Varanasi, draws devotees from the world to witness the celebration by applying ashes from funeral pyre and *gulal* (pink powder) upon each other. It is also believed to be a celebration of death, where the devotees in huge numbers take part in procession making their way to the ghat through dancing, singing, chanting '*Har-Har Mahadev*' as the ashes of the pyres and *gulal* thicken the air.

The lanes leading to the ghats are too narrow to navigate even by two-wheelers, and almost no one follows traffic rules anywhere. In this age of social media, the number of people recording the procession or celebration was higher than those who were participating.

Varanasi, also known as the spiritual capital of India, is a city on the left bank of the Ganga in Uttar Pradesh. The holy land, with over 2,000 temples and ghats, witnesses elaborate rituals, including evening *aarti* prayers that draws thousands of devotees. Many others come for taking sacred bath in the river, believed to cleanse them of sins and bestow divine blessings, while some come to meditate and take in the beauty of the surroundings.

Twilight ritual: Priests perform evening '*aarti*' prayers on the bank of the Ganga.

Classifieds

thehinduads.com

LIFE MADE SIMPLE

THE HINDU

Matrimonial

BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

BRIDEGROOMS WANTED

COSMOPOLITAN

ARYAVYSYA, 28Y, 5ft 5inch, DM Neurology, very beautiful bride seeks suitable groom, Jayasimha Parinaya Vedika, Whatsapp.9000803380

DIVORCEE

Bangalore based Own Business 52 / 173 cm Naidu - Brahmin Intercaste Father of 2 Girls : 22 Employed. 16 having Special Needs. seeks Divorcee / Widow 36 to 45 yrs. Caste No Bar. WhatsApp 95382 98649. Email: Pvrjmb@gmail.com

DOCTOR

HINDU NADAR : Girl, Age – 27, MBBS, DCH. Seeks Doctor or any other Rich Groom. Contact : 93635 70731

MD ANESTHESIOLOGY Doctor, 1989 born 165cm fair, beautiful, cultured and homely. Settled in Chennai. Father Doctor Kerala Nair , Mother Tamil CSI. Doctor and Engineer grooms preferred. Ct: 9840050381/ 9840985383

DOCTOR GIRL 30/156 MBBS MD General Medicine, seeks Doctors/ suitable grooms 9447493034, 9497168001

VANNIAR, AFFLUENT Family (Divorce) aged 33 years, Dr. MS (O&G) seeks same profession bridegroom, sub caste no bar. Call : 98941 34981

NAIDU/MBC 24/ 167 Fair,MBBS,Avittam, Makaram,both parents doctors, own hospital seeks M.S/M.D clinical doctor groom from affluent/doctor family TN/Pondy contact :6380069015 / 9790288125.

SC AD, 30 yrs, MBBS, Doctor, working in NHS, UK, Hastham, Kanni seeks groom preferably in UK. 9003017072

INTERCASTE (NAIDU– SC) 30/F doctor divorced no child. Wanted Groom – TN/ 30's/ divorced no child/ Caste no bar. Ph: 9442145470

TAMIL HINDU SC AD 32year Doctor MBBS, DCH, DNB (Pediatrics) working in Pondicherry seeking suitable groom Contact: 9443634719

GROOM WANTED
Hindu Reddy
November 90 / 165 cms,
Doctor (Surgeon) MBBS, MS,
Fair, Slim, Well Settled
Seeks Suitable Groom from
Chennai. Caste No Bar.
Call: 89256 40111

HINDU NADAR
Chennai, Only Daughter,
Fair & Charm Girl, MBBS,
MD-Y1, 24/160, Rich Affluent,
well-Educated family seeks
suitable Good Looking
Doctor Groom with clean
habits from Hindu Nadar only.
Ct: 94447 59246
94449 68235

MALAYALAM

EZHAVA GIRL 29 163cm Pooram BSNL Officer from Alappuzha Dist working at Thiruvananthapuram Prefers Govt officers or similarly placed. E5059984 Mob. 9447684815

HINDU EZHAVA Girl Rohini 32/155 B.Sc. Upper middle class.Ph :9633443697, 7736583318.

Vishwakarma (GS) Girl, Avittam, 24 years, 170 CM, ME(Bio-Tech) Native of Kollam, Kerala, Settled in Hyderabad. Seeking Suitable alliance Ph: 9346170262, 9849170262.

NRI

WANTED GROOM working in USA for a Tamil, Naidu girl, 28 years working in IT USA. Caste no bar. Contact : naturalpath93@gmail.com

TAMIL

ELITE TAMIL Muslim B.E., 23, Seeks Qualified Suitable Groom Contact: 9345148031.

ELITE TAMIL Muslim 37 B.E seeks qualified, employed, Never married Tamil Muslim Groom. 9444235779

Govt Doctor M.D 37yrs, never married Fair, seeks RC/ CSI Christian Groom Doctor,Engr 9444808870/ 8072910380

RC 34/ 165 MDS Associate Prof Dental college Chennai seeks PG Drs/ Engr/ IT Caste no bar Cont 9444157888

NAIDU BRIDE SWE Seeking Never Married Tamil / Telugu groom Age (41–44) Working in Chennai or US. Ct: hemapriya.h@gmail.com, 9962805093

HINDU 27, BARANI slim girl, Veg. Father Gowda, Mother Brahmin, MDS Senior lecturer in Dental college Seeks groom from Brahmin/Saiva Pillai. 9842979862.

TAMIL

GROOM WANTED Rich Mudaliyar, 25yrs, BE, MBA, Elite Business Family in Chennai. Ct: 9710093999/ 8939691888

MUDALIYAR DOCTOR MS 33/165 Fair well settled, Chennai seeks qualified, well mannered groom. 9962830417

MAY 94/167 fair SC/PL BE , TCS Chennai, Parents Hindu/CSI. Seeks Groom Dr/Er, Govt Employee. 8056143638

MUDALIAR (300CR): 23/165, Under graduate (Canada), Running educational Institution, Chennai, Elite Family, seeks groom – Business / Doctor – 9962530015

NADAR 33/5'6" MBA working in Chennai Elite Family Seeks qualified Groom working in Cennai. CNB 9962991972

VANNIAR FAIR Girl Uthiram 25/166 M.S. (Engg) Australia. Father S.E. (Retd) TNEB Seek Smart handsome groom with M.S (Engg) Ct : 97894 61060

VANNIYAR KULA Kshatriya Hindu Avittam 27/158, B.E seeks Well Settled Groom. Contact: 9840028346

HINDU TAMIL Veg 39/165 MS(UK) Divorcee No issues Entrepreneur , Chennai seeks Veg Groom 38–41yrs well settled affluent family. Ct: 9884816309

GROOM WANTED Elite Mudaliyar, 39yrs, LLM, Well Educated background in Chennai. Ct: 9962791888/ 8939691888

VISWAKARMA B.E/M.Plan, 1994 working L&T 65000 PM Seeking Suitable groom. 9841211033 / 9840105941

HINDU DEVAR 39Yrs B.Com MBA 1st marriage seeks suitable Groom from FC/BC caste only. CT: 9442001440.

SC AD 26/B.Tech.,SW Engr.[Bank of America]One Lakh pm.Well Settled Family.Seeks Bride Groom.Ph. 9444993417

B.Tech (IT) MBA (IIM-C) Tamil/Telugu Chettiar girl 33/170 AGM/MNC seeks suitable Edu Groom CNB 8300665039

HINDU SC/AD 31/160 BE, MS in US, employed in US H1B Visa seeks suitable groom from US/CANADA/UK Ct : 8073030092

HINDU SAMBAVAR Girl fair 35/163cm graduate State government employee 50 Thousand Salary. Seeks Suitable Bridegroom Contact: 7845213551

✔ **HINDU,NATHAMAR UDAYAR aged 31 years, Doctor doing first year M.D seeks suitable grooms belonging to either Vellalas, Mudaliars or Agamudaiyars aged below 36 years, premier institute or professional with clean habits. Ct:8870699820**

PILLAI 29/165 BE MBA(IIM) Fair good-looking girl Uthirattathi BIG4 consulting Chennai looking for groom with similar qualifications. Ct: 7358116081, arusubbu508@gmail.com

IYER– VADAMA, Bharadwaja Gothram, 31Y, Fair, 5ft. M.S.(IT), working in MNC (UK), seeking groom in the UK. Ct – 9884024668/ 9080512589

SC ARUNTHATHIYAR Thiruvathirai 9-9-1985 MSc employed 1st Marriage seeks groom. CNB. Ct:9150331377

VISWAKARMA 34 Yrs, 5'3 wheatish B.Tech, Pvt 30K monthly / Maharam, Avittam, no dosham seeks well settled groom expected. CT: 98943-34457.

TAMIL Yadava CNB - A Business family from Ooty wants Groom for their Daughter 25 Years very Fair Bachelor in Fashion Designing Sadayam - Kumbam Business / Family from Yadava/Pillai/Mudaliar.CT:9443115000

VELLALA MUDALIAR/PILLAI Well Educated Family BE 28Y/170cm MNC Software Engineer Seeks Teetotaler Software Engineer GROOM, MNC/ Abroad, WhatsApp Horo/Profile: +919445622856

EMPLOYED QUALIFIED bridegrooms is wanted for SC/AD/MSC/DB 1983/ Vishakam ,Dhulam bride 9445755194

RC MUDALIAR 28 MBA 170 V. Fair Multimillionaire Seeks RC Own Factory Business V.VIP Family Caste No Bar Contact: 7550113468

MUDALIAR ELITE 25/168, Fair, Beautiful, BE,MBA, Father Export Business, 50.Cr, CNB. 9363986547, 9363767415

ALLIANCE FOR Hindu AD, 33/174 Wheatish Bengaluru based Post Graduate, Senior Consultant, MNC Australia girl. CNB. Ct:9449000627

AGAMUDAIYAR : 26y, Fair, Caste No Bar, MBBS, DCH. Seeks Doctor ok. Any Other Suitable Groom – Chennai / Any Dist : 7824023030

HINDU MARUTHUVAR 30/159cm CA Auditor Fair Legally Divorced Seeks Groom Caste No Bar 8667868854

TAMIL

Spinster Super Specialist Doctor Tamil Brahmin Veg 48, 5'10" Hyderabad, Seeks Life Partner Brahmin Veg BrideGroom, Unmarried Preferable Doctor, Teetotaller. Cont. 9885317292 Email: drksrinivasachari@yahoo.co.in

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An Exclusive and
VIP Brahmin Family
in South India invites alliance
for their daughter 29/165
(who has finished masters
from top class university).
Matching from Affluent Family
The Boy should be tall, from big affluent family, well educated, Born before 1992
kssgrand20@gmail.com

CHRISTIAN NADAR
Kanyakumari, Only
Daughter, Medium &
Charming girl M.E.,
28/153, Upper
Middle Class, Father
Doctor
Seeks a well
settled doctor
groom with clean
habits from a good
christian family.
E-Mail : yesdeejay.art@gmail.com

Hindu, Adidravidar 26years, B.D.S Working. Seeks Suitable Groom MBBS/BDS prefered. Ct:98940 55745.

HINDU SC AD 36yrs B.E, Sr. Software Engineer TCS Chennai seeks Suitable Groom. Contact: 99521 47216

SC, AD Bride 39yrs. BE, MBA. Infosys, New Jersy City, US, Rs.3.LPM, 2nd Marriage Unconsumed Ct:9444275721

Mudaliar Girl 28 Yrs 155 cms 30,000 pm, M.Sc (Maths), Systems Engineer, TCS Chennai seeks Groom Contact: 9445387280.

Hindu Nadar, 32/165cm, very fair, MS. Working in Australia. Pooram, simmam seeks Groom, Eng/Bussiness/ Abroad/ India. CNB. 9944050546/ 9884022345

Viswakarma Dentist, 1996/172cm, own Clinic in Chennai, seeks Qualified, well settled Groom from Chennai, caste no bar Contact: 9841041225

ELITE MUDALIAR 33yrs PG divorcee seeks Employed or Business Groom in Chennai Caste no bar. Ct:9025049368

YADHAVA VEG 29/172cm BTech MBA bangalore seeks banglore based USA Groom CNB Ct: Geetham 9884858014

DOCTOR MD (Pathology), DCH, 38 yrs, Hindu BC, Divorcee without child, placed in private medical college seeks well settled, compatible & affectionate Groom. CNB.Ct:8056868090

HINDU 29/164 Mrigashira BDS., Fair Good Looking seeks IT Professional, Doctor Groom. Contact: 98403 01560

MUDALIAR: 25/V.FAIR ,MBBS, MS 2nd year doing, Chennai, Father Business, Elite Family, Seeks groom Doctor / Business /Eng – 8925019776

HINDU SC AD 28 yrs MBA Chennai Bride seeks same community Chennai qualified employed below 34 yrs Life partner groom. Ct 7338901952 Whatsapp

TELUGU

KULALA GIRL 24/154cms BE(Mech) MBA Karthigai Working Bangalore seeks suitable Educated Groom. Whatsapp your profile: 89038-19161.

✔ **NAIDU/45,** UMC, Good Looking, MCA/SW MNC Chennai, Div. seeks suitable groom. Ph. 9087296964

GROOM WANTED Rich Naidu 25yrs MBBS MS Own Hospital in Chennai Elite Business Family 9710093999/ 8939691888

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HINDU TELUGU Naidu Born Aug 1990/ 165cm Ph.D Scholar smart medium complexion from a Reputed family seeks well educated and settled groom in India born after 1987 Ct:9790908109

BRIDES WANTED

BUSINESS

AGE 38 Handsome, Comfortable Groom needs VIP Girl and first Marriage, Remarriage, Divorce. Ct: 9597834451

COSMOPOLITAN

ARYAVYSYA, 36Y, 5ft 9inch, M. S.(Engg), 18 LPA, 8Cr, Chennai, Jayasimha Parinaya Vedika, Whtspp 9000803380

Age 46 Christian divorced annulled Working for MNC IT seeks Suitable Bride Religion No Bar. 96771 51440

GAVARA, 28Y, Jr. Doctor in Delhi AIIMS, Very handsome Groom seeks suitable bride, Jayasimha Parinaya Vedika, Whatsapp.9000803380

DOCTOR

SC/AD KRITHIKAI 28/168, MBBS, Captain Medical Officer, Indian Army, Kashmir, Seeks for bride working in army as officer. CNB. Ct: 9486008423

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TAMIL

CHRISTIAN CSI Protestant Nadar Boy, 29/5.9, B.Tech, MBA, IT MNC, Chennai Ct: 9445447952

SAIVA PILLAI,36,Rohini, IT, 35K pm, Madurai, Own House. Caste No Bar. Ct: 8056588515

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TAMIL

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BRIDE WANTED Rich Naidu 28yrs MBBS, MS Own Hospitals Chennai, Elite Business Family 9710093999/ 9710091999

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As demand for WFH grows, companies say status quo remains for now

Experts say most big firms have systems in place for water conservation and focus should be on ensuring the city manages its water systems better

WATER WOES

K.C. Deepika
BENGALURU

Ever since Bengaluru started feeling the pinch about the water situation, demand for work from home (WFH) has almost overtaken calls for conservation efforts and other long-term solutions. Many of those demanding WFH believe that allowing them to work from their home towns will result in depopulating the city, which will ease the situation.

Social media users have left a trail of comments on the water situation, which include arguments that more IT companies in Bengaluru mean more people migrating to the city, more infrastructure, and more stress on water resources, which is why companies need to provide WFH as an alternative. Many have argued that the city is visibly overpopulated and in addition to paying heavy rent and maintenance, they are now being forced to buy water.

Many of those demanding work-from-home option believe that allowing them to work from their home towns will result in depopulating Bengaluru, which will ease the situation. FILE PHOTO

However, a cross-section of companies *The Hindu* spoke to said the *status quo* remains for now and they would only think of going back to complete remote work like in the times of the COVID-19 pandemic if the situation demands it.

Krishna Bettan from workplace resources, NetApp, said the ongoing water crisis is a temporary situation. "At the office, we're putting in more measures to restrict wastage of water as we've always been doing. But the work situation is hybrid and employees come to the office on a needs basis. Teams take a call based on their work and deliverables," he said.

Priya M. Pillai , HR, Titan, said post-COVID-19, they were clear that there would be no WFH option for retail and manufacturing. However, she acknowledged that talent retention was also a factor as WFH became a prime asking factor. "COVID broke the myth that output means having to sit in the office. We took a calibrated policy. So flexibility has increased. Every Wednesday is a work from anywhere because the weekend may not be enough. But we have never had WFH completely wherein people are being forced to come back to work," she said.

Hybrid mode

Even for smaller teams of bigger companies in Bengaluru, hybrid continues to be the way forward. Gayathri Shankar, Head DEI, Ramboll India, which operates out of a coworking space in Bengaluru, said, "We have not seen any need for us to enter the space of the employees' personal life on the water front. In the office, we've been doing what we have to conserve water. Hybrid will continue. As of now, we haven't thought of increasing it. We will know the situation once schools close for vacation. The way forward is tied up with the timelines and the water situation. The buildings we work out of have not got any communication on frugal supply as of now."

Meanwhile, Amit Agarwal, CEO and Co-founder, NoBroker.com, said the demand for office spaces has experienced a substantial uptick across all major metropolitan areas. "In Bengaluru, gross leasing volume experienced a notable surge of approximately 30% in 2023 when compared with 2021, surpassing the pre-pandemic peak of 2019."

Asked how the water situation is affecting this, he said, "Undoubtedly, there has been an increased demand for water supply in office spaces, attributed to companies urging employees to return to the workplace. Notably, in A-grade office spaces, we have not identified water shortage as a predominant consideration for companies seeking office spaces thus far. Having said this, water is a critical parameter and worry is being felt across the city as we are entering the summer season."

Water conservationist S. Vishwanath concurred, saying most big companies have systems in place for water conservation. About the WFH argument, he said, "Bengaluru is an engine of livelihood. We need to make sure it is liveable. We need to manage our water systems better to ensure water for all."

BWSSB collating water usage data in all apartments

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) has begun an exercise to collate the details of water usage at all apartments in the city.

"We have asked the Bangalore Apartment Federation (BAF) to collect details of water usage at all apartments in the city and sources of water for this usage and their proportion. Once we collate all these details, the BWSSB will work towards meeting the minimum water requirement at these apartments," said V. Ram Prasath Manohar, chairman, BWSSB.

Mr. Manohar has set a 30-day deadline for the same.

He was speaking at an event where the BWSSB launched a Green Star Rating Challenge for apartment complexes in the city on Friday. A similar initiative was launched for restaurants on Saturday.

Individual metres

Representatives of the BAF drew attention to the need for individual metres for flats within apartments for better monitoring of water usage and conservation. Mr. Manohar said this would need an amendment to the existing law and the board would take up the issue with the State government soon.

Hindustani vocal concert today

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Sapthak Bangalore, under its Baithak series, will present Hindustani vocal recitals by Meghana Kulkarni, Omkarnath Havaldar, Koushik Aithal, and Dhananjay Hegde on Sunday. They will be accompanied by Sagar Bharatraj and Yogeesh Bhat on tabla and Bharat Hegde and Tejas Katoti on harmonium. The programme will be held at Naadshree Artspace, 2nd Floor, 3rd Main Road, BCMC Layout, Raghuvanahalli, from 9.30 a.m.

Apartments adopt unique methods of water conservation

JAHNAVI T.R.
BENGALURU

Many residential societies in Bengaluru are now on the lookout for innovative ways to conserve water amid the ongoing crisis. The focus is mainly on the reuse of discharged wastewater from RO filter systems and sewage treatment plants (STP).

One of the methods which has proven effective for these societies is using the wastewater discharged from RO water filters in a centralised manner to reap greater benefits.

For instance, after the Bangalore Water Supply and Sewerage Board (BWSSB) issued an order saying that drinking water should not be used for non-potable purposes, Aristocrat Apartments at Kasturinagar came up with a way to collect around 600 litres of RO wastewater every day.

In some apartment complexes, discharged wastewater from RO filter systems is being used for car washing, mopping of common areas, and for plants. JAHNAVI T.R.

"We first did a survey in the apartment and found that out of 145 units, we can get around 10 litres of RO wastewater every day from around 70 units. We gave them 10-litre cans to fill and keep outside their houses. This water will then be poured into two 200- litre drums which we have bought. By fitting taps and hose to those tanks, we can use that water for car washing, mopping of common areas, and for plants," said Rohini Ghose, secretary of the apartment association. She added that as they are left with some spare water after utilisation, they have sent the samples to a NAPL-accredited laboratory to see if all the required parameters are met to use it for other purposes such as topping up swimming pools.

Sharing ideas

Apartments which had employed unique conservation methods even before the crisis struck are now sharing their ideas to help other societies conserve water.

Krishnanagar Apartments at Vimanapura has connected the RO waste discharge systems from all houses in a centralised manner to let the water into rainwater harvesting (RWH) pits. "Per day, we can conserve up to 6,000 litres of water with this method at a mere material and labour cost of ₹3,000. While the treated water from the RWH pits can be used for non-potable purposes, as the RWH pits are close to our borewells, it can also help in recharging the groundwater," said an ex-committee member from the society.

At Sobha Classic in HSR Layout too, the centralised RO system has reduced the wastage of water.

"Individually, for every eight litres of water that is filtered for drinking, 25 litres are wasted. But as we have this centralised system, the loss is only 25%," said Sreejith Govind, a member of the apartment's managing committee.

While most apartments use STP water for flushing, gardening, and cleaning purposes, some apartments have found a way to ensure the water that remains after their usage does not go to waste.

"After our usage, we used to pump around 50 KLD STP water into the drain. Hence, we tied up with a private company which converts STP water into potable water. Such treated water can also be bought back by the apartment and used to fill swimming pools or for other such uses," said Jubin Thomson, secretary of the apartment welfare association.

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Walk around medicinal plants on GKVK campus

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Department of Horticulture, University of Agricultural Sciences-Bangalore, GKVK campus, will be organising a walk-a-thon on Sunday.

This guided walk around the medicinal and aromatic plants heritage site on the GKVK campus is being organised to provide exposure to various aspects of agriculture and horticulture to participants, the UAS-B in a release said.

The general public may register with a fee of ₹200. Link: https://rawe2020.in/2024/03/11/walkaround-medicinal-aromatic-plants-heritage-site/). The walk will be held from 6.30 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Book release today

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The book *Bimba Bimbana*, written by Girish Kasaravalli, co-authored by Gopalakrishna Pai, and published by Veeraloka, will be released on Sunday. The former Minister and film actor and producer Jaimala will release the book. Television and film director B.S. Lingadevaru will participate as the chief guest at the book release programme to be held in Sri Krishnaraja Parishat Mandira, Kannada Sahitya Parishat premises, at Chamarajpet at 10.30 a.m.

LIC HFL
LIC HOUSING FINANCE LTD

LIC HOUSING FINANCE LTD.,
15/1, Hayes Centre, Hayes Road, Bangalore -560025. Ph.: 080-43003651

E-auction Sale Notice For Sale Of Immovable Assets Under the Securitisation And Reconstruction Of Financial Assets And Enforcement Of Security Interest Act 2002, R/w Provision To Rule 8(6) Of The Security Interest Enforcement Rules 2002

The E-Auction sale notice is hereby given to the public in general and in particular to the borrower(s) and guarantor(s) that , the below described immovable property mortgaged/charged to the secured creditor, WHEREAS the undersigned being the Authorized Officer of L.I.C. Housing Finance Ltd (LIC HFL), under Securitization & Reconstructions of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 & in exercise of powers conferred under section 13 (12) read with Rule 3 of the Security Interest (Enforcement) Rules, 2002 had issued Demand Notice to following Borrowers/Mortgagors calling upon them to repay the outstanding due amount mentioned in the said notices. However, The Borrowers/Mortgagors having failed to repay the said due amount, the undersigned has taken SYMBOLIC POSSESSION of the following properties in exercise of powers conferred U/s 13(4) of the said Act read with the Rule 8 of the said Rules. The mortgaged property will be sold on As is where is Basis', 'As is what is Basis', 'Whatever there is' And 'Without Any Recourse Basis'.

Loan No./ Name of Borrower/Co–Borrower	Property Address and Flat Area/ UDS of land
M/s. Regaliaa Buildtech & Mr. Anup Shyam Karnani, M/s. Regaliaa Buildtech (Regalia) Loan No. 411900012004 & 411900013088	SCHEDULE PROPERTY-'A' All that piece and parcel of the residentially converted bearing: Survey No.132/1B admeasuring 9.76 guntas, Survey No.132/1A admeasuring 19.99 guntas, Survey No.133/2 admeasuring 28.02 guntas, Survey No.133/1 admeasuring 32.27 guntas, Survey No.134/1 admeasuring 10.91 guntas, i.e. admeasuring in the aggregate 2 acres 21 guntas all of and situated in Nagawara Village, Kasaba Hobli, Bangalore North Taluk, Bangalore District, in the State of Karnataka and bounded as follows; On or towards the North : by Proposed 100 Ft Approach road / Tanisandra Main Road, On or towards the South : by portion of Sy No.132/2 On or towards the East : by proposed 100' wide Tanisandra main road. On or towards the West : by remaining property of the owner, SCHEDULE PROPERTY-'B' : 60% of undivided share right, title & interest in the Second Schedule 'A' property, measuring 66.129 sq.ft and the super built-up area to be constructed thereon, (1) Comprising of shopping area, anchor area, food court and stalls, etc. In the basement to the seventh floor(Excluding hotel area fallen to the share of land owner) 133377.69 sft (2) Share in multiplex (undivided by metes and bounds) : 50318.64 sft Total Developers Share/Area : 181472.71 sft. (3) 60% of Car parking spaces in the building. SCHEDULE PROPERTY-'B1' ; Undivided share of 60% in land admeasuring in the aggregate 2 Acres 20.95 Gunthas (the said plots of Land), all of and situated in Nagavara Village, kasaba Hobli, Bangalore North Taluk, Bangalore District, in the State of Karnataka, Bengaluru 560077, more described as Schedule "A" Property amounting to 66,129 sft and 60% area allotted to the share of developer in the gross super built up area of 50,708.96 sq mtrs as mentioned herein below.

Particulars	Developers share (sq.Mts)
Mall area	20.364.36
Multiplex area	1,894.49
Basement area for car parking	8,127.62
Total	30,386.47

Particulars	Owners share	Developers share	Total (Sq.Mts)
Multiplex area	5,683.49	1894.49	7,577.98

Particulars	Owners share	Developers share	Total (Sq.Mts)
2nd basement floor	4,269.67	1,935.90	6205.57
1st basement floor	1,148.75	6,191.72	7,340.47
Total in sq mtrs	5,418.42	8,127.62	13,546.04

Super Built up Areas Allotted to the share of the Developer/Land Owner in terms of the Area Sharing Agreement dated 14-11-2014

Particulars	Mall area (Sq. Mts)		
Floors	Owners share	Developers share	Mall area total
Ground floor	-	5,010.37	5,010.37
First floor	-	4,632.64	4,632.64
Second loor	-	3,357.69	33,357.69
Third floor	-	3,681.83	3,681.83
Fourth floor	-	3681,83	3,681.83
Fifth floor	-	-	-
Sixth floor	-	-	-
Seventh floor	-	-	-
Terrace floor	-	-	-
Total in sq mtrs	-	20,346.36	20,346.36

Number of car parking spaces including Mechanical Parking

Particulars	Owners share	Developers share	Total
2nd basement floor	252	86	338
1st basement floor	-	292	292
Total car park	252	378	630

Date of Demand Notice	17 MAY 2022
Reserve Price (Amount in Rs.)	228,00,00,000/- (Two Hundred And Twenty-eight Crore)
EMD (10%) of Reserve Price	22,80,00,000/- (Twenty-two Crore Eighty Lakhs)
Bank details (EMD to be transferred to)	Beneficiary Name : LIC Housing Finance Ltd Beneficiary Branch Name : Axis Bank, Centralised Collection Hub Account Number : HFLESCBABC12004 IFSC Code : UTIB0CCH274
E-AUCTION DATE	08.04.2024
LAST DATE OF SUBMISSION OF E-BID FORM	06.04.2024

Further to this PUBLIC NOTICE for E-Auction Sale of the above said Assets / properties (in terms and conditions of the SARFAESI, Act 2002 and rules thereunder) LICHFL invites online mode to purchase the said properties on "AS IS WHERE IS BASIS" and "AS IS WHAT IS BASIS".

THE TERMS & CONDITIONS OF THE AUCTION SALE ARE AS FOLLOWS:-

1. E-Auction is being held on 'As is where is Basis', 'As is what is Basis', 'Whatever there is' And 'Without Any Recourse Basis', and will be conducted "Online".
2. The intending bidders are advised to visit https://online.lichousing.com/eauction/ for the details of the properties in the website and for taking part in the bid and proceed further. For any further details contact Authorised person Phone No. : 9380020741/9972022461
3. The successful bidder/s shall deposit 25% of the amount of sale price, adjusting the EMD paid already, immediately/within next working day on acceptance of offer by the Authorized officer in respect of the sale, failing which the earnest money deposited shall be forfeited. The balance 75% of the sale price is payable within 15 days from the date of confirmation of the sale solely at the discretion of the Authorized Officer. In case of failure to deposit the balance amount within the prescribed period, the amount deposited shall be forfeited. The Authorized Officer shall not be required to give any further notice of forfeiture to the successful bidder.
4. Bidding increment fixed for Rs.25,00,000 /- increment per BID.
5. Bidders are bound by the principle of "caveat emptor" (Buyer Beware) and advised to conduct their own due diligence to find any encumbrances, statutory liabilities, arrears of property tax, Income Tax, Excise Duty, Labour Dues, electricity and maintenance dues etc., of the firm or Secured Asset. The Successful bidders shall have to bear all outgoing i.e., municipal taxes, maintenance/society charges, electricity charges, water charges, stamp duty, registration charges, taxes, or any other duties ,if any and all other incidentals charges, cost including all outgoing relating to the respective properties other than the sale price.
6. The L.I.C Housing Finance Limited reserves the right to CANCEL / ACCEPT / REJECT / ALTER / MODIFY / POSTPONE the TENDER SALE / AUCTION without giving any reason whatsoever or prior Notice.

Place: Bangalore

Authorized Officer & Manager,
Mr. Arokia Ezhil Nilavan, L.I.C Housing Finance Ltd, Back Office, Bangalore

Vibrant splash: Participants throw ash and coloured powder as part of the celebration.

Traditional tribute: The celebration is a mixture of culture, tradition, and spirituality.

Holi hues: Devotees, dressed as the Hindu god Shiva, chant as ashes fill the air.

Sacred rites: A priest offering the evening ritual prayers.

Festive spirit: The celebration is not for the faint-heart as crowds descend on the banks of the river Ganga, in an atmosphere thick with ashes from funeral pyres and *gulal*. This year, social media enthusiasts were part of the scene.

Complaint against BBMP officials for relocating stray dogs

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Ten community dogs were allegedly moved from a tech park at Iblur to the outskirts of the city illegally

Members of the Animal Welfare Board of India (AWBI) are up in arms against the Bruhat Bengaluru Mahanagara Palike (BBMP) for its attitude towards stray dogs.

The assistant secretary of the AWB has filed a complaint with the member-secretary of the State Animal Welfare Board, copied to the Commissioner of Animal Husbandry and the BBMP Chief Commissioner, for allegedly relocating 10 community dogs from a tech park at Iblur to the outskirts of the city illegally.

In the complaint, the assistant secretary, Prachi Jain, said the board had learnt about the incident through an email complaint about the alleged illegal relocation of all the community dogs from Vaishnavi Tech Square at Iblur, Bellandur, to a shelter home at Bidadi outside BBMP jurisdiction.

The complaint also alleged that the BBMP has facilitated this illegal relocation, quoting the AWBI community dog adoption procedure circular, and none of the 10 dogs was adopted to homes and no AWBI-recognised AWOs or SPCA members were involved in the adoption.

Interaction with FM today

The Hindu Bureau
MYSURU

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will take part in an interaction programme organised by Thinkers Forum, Mysuru, on Sunday.

The event will take place at the convocation hall of the Karnataka State Open University (KSOU) from 4 p.m. onwards.

A release issued by the forum said the interaction will explore the dynamics of India's financial roadmap and those interested can enroll through www.bit.ly/TFMysuru, the release added.

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MUDA Commissioner, broker arrested

The Hindu Bureau
MANGALURU

The Lokayukta police on Saturday arrested MUDA Commissioner Mansoor Ali for allegedly demanding ₹25 lakh as a bribe for issuing a TDR certificate to a city resident. A broker, Mohammed Saleem, was also arrested while accepting the bribe on behalf of Mr. Ali.

According to a press note, the complainant had purchased 10.8 acres of land in Kudupu village and was corresponding with MCC for handing over the land to it for expanding the civic body's solid waste treatment facility at Pachchanady. In January 2024, the 10.8 acres of land was registered in MCC's name. MCC Commissioner C.L. Anand wrote to Mr. Ali in Feburuary to issue TDR certificate to the complainant. Mr. Ali had kept the file pending.

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Karnataka's judiciary is leading social transformation: CJI

In the State, of the 447 civil judges 200 are women, which is about 44% of the working strength in the civil judges' cadre

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Karnataka district judiciary is leading social transformation in the country by employing the highest number of women civil judges and its rate of disposal of cases is truly a performance to replicate across the country, said Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud in Bengaluru on Saturday.

Speaking at the 21st biennial State-level conference of judicial officers of Karnataka in Bengaluru, he said the number of women in judiciary is heartening as its 37% of its working strength in district judiciary.

In Karnataka, of the 447 civil judges, 200 are women, which constitutes about 44% of the working strength in the civil judges' cadre, the CJI said while pointing out that the increase in the number of women judicial officers is crucial not only to correct historic lack of representation in our courts but also to bring diverse perspectives and experiences to the table, resulting in the more effective adjudication process.

"Your contribution to judiciary is of immense importance and you serve as a source of inspiration for the future generation of women aspiring to purpose career in law and Indian judiciary," the CJI told the women judicial officers.

Supreme Court judge B.V. Nagarathna, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, and Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud at the 21st biennial State-level conference of judicial officers of Karnataka, in Bengaluru on Saturday.

Disposal of cases

On disposal of cases by the district judiciary in Karnataka, he said that 20.62 lakh cases were disposed of the 22.25 lakh cases instituted between January 1, 2023, and March 23, 2024, while stating this performance is a model to replicate across the country.

Stating that work-life balance is integral to fulfil duties effectively, the CJI said that a judge, who is overwhelmed with work and unable to prioritise personal time with family and self care may struggle to perform optimally. "Therefore, the ability to manage stress and to achieve work-life balance is not separate from but rather intertwined with delivering justice," he added.

The CJI said that the judiciary must have objective yardsticks to access what is its output and what is the quality of work that it is rendering, and how different the judiciary is making the life of citizens by the expenditure and investment of public revenue.

Stating that the district judiciary and grassroots-level judges are the backbone of the Indian judiciary, Chief Justice of Karnataka High Court N.V. Anjaria has said that the common man's faith in judicial institution originates from here as the district courts and its judges bear a direct connection to the litigants for their plight and aspiration of justice more than the role played by the High Courts or the Supreme Court.

On language

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said that language should not be a barrier to justice. "The use of the local language in court proceedings, or the integration of artificial intelligence to provide real-time updates and translations, can significantly enhance the understanding and participation of litigants in the judicial process," Mr. Siddaramaiah said.

'I was trolled through doctored video'

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Chief Justice of India D.Y. Chandrachud on Saturday recalled a recent incident where he was subjected to trolling and vicious abuse through a doctored video clip, from the Supreme Court's live streaming, posted on social media, for merely adjusting his seating position during the hearing of a case.

"I was labelled as arrogant by some social media users claiming I got up in the midst of an important argument in court," he said while pointing out that he had some pain in his back, and all that he did was that he placed his elbows on the armchair in the court and just shifted position.

"I didn't leave the court. I only shifted my position but I was subject to vicious abuse, trolling, the knives were out..." he said while talking about work-life balance and stress management for judges.

City's realty market on the ascent: Industry players

Actor Namratha Gowda inaugurated 'Living Spaces Property Expo 2024' at Chandra Sagar Conventional Hall, Jayanagar, Bengaluru, on Saturday. SUDHAKARA JAIN

Mini Tejaswi
BENGALURU

Bengaluru's realty market has been witnessing additional traction in the last couple of quarters with both individuals and businesses from across the country and overseas increasingly wanting to have a share in the market, as per industry players and financial institutions.

The trend was evident at 'Living Spaces Property Expo 2024', a two-day annual property exposition opened by *The Hindu* here on Saturday.

Sajid Hussain, Deputy General Manager, Customer Acquisition Centre, Punjab National Bank, said, "We are seeing an increased demand for homes in Bengaluru compared to other metros. Delivery from realty developers is also better here. More people are coming to the city wanting to own homes here. Bengaluru, being the tech hub and start-up capital, is a magnet that attracts people and companies from all over today."

Impact of Act

Echoing similar sentiments, A. Venkat Ramana, Assistant General Manager, GBV-Head, Punjab National Bank, said the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act has brought a lot of sanity to the industry and in turn enhanced customer confidence. "Home and office space segments are big within a 100-km radius around the city," commented Mr. Ramana.

According to Hemanth J., Regional Marketing Manager (Karnataka and Tamil Nadu), IIFL Finance, the home loan segment has been growing steadily as spending patterns and comfort preferences of people have hugely changed after the pandemic.

Casagrand, a realty developer which has five completed projects, eight ongoing projects and 10 projects in the pipeline, has reported traction across segments. "We are seeing movements in all categories ranging from ₹48 lakh to ₹2.5 crore," said S. Purushotham Naidu, Brand Manager, Casagrand.

According to Namratha Gowda, an actress and model in Bengaluru who inaugurated the expo, 'Living Spaces' is an ideal place to visit for people like her who want to save and invest in branded real estate properties, farmland, and house plots.

"The fact is, realty never depreciates and investments only grow. It is the right time to buy a home, and it is important to invest in Bengaluru. Our young working people should save and invest in real estate instead of wasting money on cars and expensive lifestyle products," the Bigg Boss Kannada Season 10 participant opined.

She said girls generally tend to work hard to save money to buy jewellery and to fund their extravagant weddings. "I don't think women should continue to do such things, instead, they should save money and try to own a place, that is real freedom."

Confirming the trend was Kundavaram Mohan Rao, Marketing Officer, Central Bank of India, who said, the bank's newly introduced Cent Grih Lakshmi, a home loan scheme for women, has received a significant response from the market.

Rental farming

Rental farming is a new concept that is likely to emerge and catch up soon across Karnataka, said Tilak D.P, Director, Krushika Farming Community, an agricultural cooperative in Bengaluru. "There are a lot of people who are interested in farming but cannot afford to buy farmland or manage them round the year. Such individuals and families can explore farm rental options," he added.

The expo at Chandra Sagar Convention Hall near Ashoka Pillar, will on Sunday have Karthik Mahesh, actor, model and Big Boss 2024 Season 10 winner, as the special guest.

Probe ordered into harassment charge by Bengaluru Rural District Family Welfare Officer against DHO

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Following allegations of harassment by the Bengaluru Rural District Family Welfare Officer against the jurisdictional District Health Officer (DHO) concerning the investigation into female foeticide cases in two hospitals, the State Health Department has ordered a probe into the issue.

Bengaluru Rural District Family Welfare Officer S.R. Manjunath has alleged that the DHO, Sunil Kumar, has been harassing him for continuing investigation and registering cases against two private hospitals in Hoskote and Nelamangala taluks that have been accused of running a sex determination racket.

In December last, the Bengaluru police unearthed a prenatal sex determination racket across Bengaluru, Mandya, and Mysuru districts. They arrested a doctor and his lab technician, who allegedly performed around 900 illegal abortions in the last three years. The State government had, in the first week of January, constituted a task force for the PCPNDT Act implementation under the chairmanship of the Health Commissioner

The issue concerns investigation into female foeticide cases at two private hospitals in Hoskote and Nelamangala taluks

Complaining about the harassment, Dr. Manjunath (who is also the Pre-Conception and Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques nodal officer in the district), wrote to State Health Commissioner Randeep D. on March 20. In his capacity as the district PCPNDT nodal officer, Dr. Manjunath had registered FIRs against SPG Hospital in Hoskote and Asare Hospital in Nelamangala, accusing them of running prenatal sex determination rackets.

In the letter, Dr. Manjunath sought permission to go on leave as Dr. Kumar was not allowing him to discharge his duties concerning the investigation into the sex determination racket. He also informed the Commissioner that he was working under extreme stress. Prior to this, Dr. Kumar wrote to the Commissioner on March 19 appealing him to transfer Dr. Manjunath because "his report regarding the two hospitals was not factually correct and that he was not properly discharging his duties."

Panel to investigate

Acknowledging the letters, Mr. Randeep told *The Hindu* that a three-member committee headed by the Reproductive Child Health Project Director, the Deputy Director (PCPNDT), and the Deputy Director (Family Welfare) has been set up to investigate the allegations. The committee has been asked to look into the allegations of both the doctors as well as the violation of the PCPNDT Act by the two hospitals and submit its report by March 26, he said.

Elephant, tiger found dead

The Hindu Bureau
MYSURU

A tiger and an elephant were found dead due to natural causes in different forests of the State on Saturday.

The carcass of an aged tiger was found in the Anechowkur range of Nagarahole tiger reserve by the forest guards.

In BRT Tiger Reserve, a female elephant was found dead in the Yelandur Wildlife Division on Saturday.

PUBLIC NOTICE

My client **Sri.Pavan Kumar Singh** (Aadhar No.2697 2995 1904, Residing at Flat No D- 211 2nd floor, Raja Rajeshwari Nivas Apartment, Vajpayee Nagar, Behind HTMT Bommanhalli. Bangalore 56006. Mob 9673373434) intend to purchase the schedule property, this is to brings to the notice of general public that the Original Sale deed dt.23.04.2005, Doc. No. 1829/2005-06 of Book I, CD No.BASD163, in the office of the Sub-Registrar Bangalore South Taluk, Bangalore in respect of Flat No.D-211, in Second Floor of Block 'D' of the building known as **"Raja Rajeshwari Nivas"** measuring of Super built up area 773 Sq.ft., and 491 Sq.ft., of Undivided share rights in Property bearing Municipal No.393/28-291 and Khatha Nos.484 to 495 and presently bearing Khatha No.495 Situated at Hongasandra Village, Begur Hobli, Bangalore South Taluk and measuring 113256 Sq.ft., the Seller Sri Mahanth.N has lost at the time of travelling. My Client intend to avail loan from SBI, Dollars Colony Branch, code No.09042.

If any person/company has any right, title, interest, claims, objections in schedule property or found the flat Sale deed, please inform to the below address within **7 days** from this publication. If No objection / claims within this period my client will proceed to purchase the said schedule property. Police Complaint is also given vide Lost **Report No.0919211/2024, dated 06.02.2024.**

Y. Sowmya Yadav, Advocate
Samvruddhi Legal, # 83, Ground Floor, 5th 'A' Cross, 21st Main, J.P. Nagar 2nd Phase, Bangalore-78. **M : 9916343921**

PUBLIC NOTICE

My clients Sri.Imran Khan, Sri.Fairoz Khan, Sri Mohsin Khan and Sri.Javed Khan intending to purchase the property from Smt.Shabeen Taj, Smt.Jabeen Taj, Smt.Nazima and Smt.Ayesha Shabnum in respect of property bearing House List No.3, in Katha No. 370, situated at **Bommanahalli Village, Begur Hobli, Bangalore South Taluk**, measuring **East to West: 30 ft. and North to South: 77 ft.**, in all measuring 2310 Sq. ft., My Client intend to avail loan from PNB, Jayanagar Branch, Bangalore.

Any person or persons having/asserting any right title or interest/claims or intending to oppose the purchase in any manner may file their objections to the undersigned within **7 days** from the publication of Notice hereof with documentary proof where after no such claims will be entertained and my client will proceed with the purchase of the said property.

Y. Sowmya Yadav, Advocate
Samvruddhi Legal, # 83, Ground Floor, 5th 'A' Cross, 21st Main, J.P. Nagar 2nd Phase, Bangalore-78. **M : 9916343921**

PUBLIC NOTICE

That my client **Ashish Arunkumar Chotai**, No.442, 1st Main, 5th Block, KHB Colony, Koramangala, Bangalore-560095, had lost the Original Sale Deed dated: 25-07-2002, which was executed by Sri S. Manohar in favour of Sri Kodanda Rama Reddy and others, vide document No.5022/2002-03, registered in the Office of the Sub-Registrar, Bangalore South Taluk and a General Power of Attorney dated: 03-03-2003, executed by Sri Kodandarama Reddy and others, in favour of: Sri H.K.Purushotham in respect of the Schedule Property. The Present owner Mr. Ashish Arunkumar Chotai had lodged a complaint before the Bengaluru City Police station authorities, vide Lost Report No.0978726/2024, dated: 18/03/2024.

That my client has requested the General Public that if the said documents are traced by them, kindly hand over the same to him or to his said Advocate within 07 days of time from this date of publication and the compliant will be suitably rewarded.

SCHEDULE PROPERTY

Site No.155, in Converted Sy.No.101/5, Khatha No.613 of Haralur Village, Bellandur Panchayath, Varhtur Hobli, Bangalore South Taluk, Now within the limits of BBMP, Bangalore, measuring East to West: 40 Feet and North to South 30 feet, and bounded by:

East : Road **West** : Site No.160
North : Site No.154 **South** : Site No.156

A Manjunath, Advocate
No. 924, 1st Floor, 28th Main, 9th Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore - 560069
M: +919845395528

PUBLIC NOTICE

It is hereby notified that, my clients have agreed to purchase the Schedule property from its Owners: **Sri.B.R.PRAKASH** S/o Late B.Rama Rao and his wife **Smt.GEETHA PRAKASH,** residing at No.1, 1st Main Road, NR Colony, Bangalore-560019.

Apart from the said Owners, if any other person/s have any manner of right, title and or interest or claim or charge or lien over the Schedule property or otherwise have any lawful objection/s for sale of the Schedule Property by the aforesaid Owner, they are hereby called upon to file their objection/s in writing, along with the photocopies of documents on which they rely, with the undersigned, within 07 days from the date of publication of this notice. Objection/s received thereafter will not be binding on my clients.

SCHEDULE

All that piece and parcel of the immovable property bearing Municipal No.1 (CITB/BDA Site No.650), PID No.60-106-1, measuring East to West (42 +80.2) ft and North to South 30 ft, with a building thereon, situated at 10th D Main Road, Jayanagara 4th Block, Bangalore and bounded on:

East by : 11th Main Road
West by : 10th 'D' Main Road
North by : 30th Cross Road
South by : Site No.649

Sd/- **S.F. GOUTAM CHAND**
Advocate
GOUTAM ASSOCIATES
No.60, 2nd Floor, Kanakapura Road, Basavanagudi, Bangalore-560 004.

Timings
BENGALURU

SUNDAY, MAR. 24	
RISE 06:21	SET 18:31
RISE 17:55	SET 05:44
MONDAY, MAR. 25	
RISE 06:20	SET 18:31
RISE 18:40	SET 06:17
TUESDAY, MAR. 26	
RISE 06:20	SET 18:31
RISE 19:25	SET 06:50

Bengaluru Weather	max	min
Tumakuru	33	24
Mysuru	34	23
Bengaluru	33	21

Bengaluru Today
33°C A dry weather to continue. Morning will be pleasant with mist and haze. Day will be warm. Night also will be pleasant.

Bengaluru Tomorrow
34°C The weather will be dry. Morning will be pleasant with mist and haze. Day will be warm and uneasy. Night will be pleasant.

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THE HINDU
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Cybercrooks attempt to con HC judges

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Cybercrooks have attempted to con two High Court judges by threatening to foist cases against them, in separate incidents.

The two judges alerted the High Court security officials, who in turn complained to the Vidhana Soudha police seeking a detailed investigation.

Based on the complaint, the police registered two FIRs against unknown persons charging them with criminal intimidation and cheating.

According to the complaint, a conman, posing as a staff member of the Department of Personnel and Training, called a judge's personal number on Saturday and alleged that he was sharing anti-national messages from the SIM generated in his name. The caller said the department had complained to the Andheri East police in Mumbai for circulating objectionable messages and transferred the call to his associate to settle the case. The accused claimed to be a police officer, threatened the judge, and demanded money to drop the case.

The judge disconnected the call and alerted the High Court security.

A similar attempt was made with another judge. The caller used a similar *modus operandi* alleging the misuse of his SIM card for placing objection advertisements and threatened him with criminal cases filed with the Mumbai police. Another caller, who claimed to be a police officer, threatened him with cases and demanded money to settle the issue.

The police are now trying to track down the accused based on their call record details.

Police step up probe in triple murder case

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The Kora police have stepped up the investigation into the triple murder reported at Kunchangi village on the outskirts of Tumakuru on Thursday.

Passersby noticed a burnt car in an isolated place and alerted the police. The police rushed to the spot and found three charred bodies in the back seat and in the boot space of the car.

The police, with the help of the car registration number, ascertained the identity of the deceased as Sahul, 45, Istiyaq, 56, and Imtiyaz of Belthangady, Dakshina Kannada.

Victims tortured?

The police suspect the victims were tortured and killed by the assailants before they set fire to the car.

Three charred bodies were found in a car that was set on fire on the outskirts of Tumakuru.

The police are now gathering the CCTV footage to ascertain the identity of the assailants.

According to the police, the victims had borrowed the car from a friend and had come to Tumakuru to meet people to discuss a hidden treasure. The police suspect the accused killed them after a failed extortion bid. The police said they had vital clues about the assailants and efforts were on to track them down.

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Second edition of percussion festival kicks off with thunderous performances

The event today will feature three performances — Rhythms of India, Ashtanayika - Kal Aur Aaj, and Taufiq Qureshi's Surya

Praveen Sudevan
BENGALURU

The second edition of the two-day Mahindra Percussion Festival stormed into Bengaluru this weekend, igniting the Prestige Srihari Khoday Centre for Performing Arts with a thunderous opening day of performances.

The first day's events began with a slightly subdued crowd, the emcee's energetic greeting met with hesitant applause. However, the atmosphere quickly transformed as the Charu Hariharan Quartet took the stage, featuring the traditional percussion ensemble Kozhikode Nanthalakootam and artists from the Jenu Kuruba tribe of Nagarahole.

Swarathma, Thavil Raja, and the Beat Gurus performing at the Mahindra Percussion Festival in Bengaluru on Saturday. K. MURALI KUMAR

A compelling blend

Charu and her quartet opened with three original compositions, showcasing a compelling blend of classical Indian percussion with contemporary influences. The energy shifted as the Kozhikode Nanthalakootam joined the quartet, their powerful chenda drumming adding a distinctly Keralan flavour to the performance. The Jenu Kurubas' arrival further electrified the stage, their unique instruments crafted from bamboo, antenna dishes, and plastic containers infusing a raw, folk energy into the proceedings.

Two Summ, featuring Viveick Rajagopalan and Anantha R. Krishnan, introduced a fascinating digital-analog hybrid – the MIDI mridangam (or the MIDIdangam). Their performance built from a gentle drizzle into a rhythmic downpour, Anantha's humour lightening the mood as intricate melodies flowed. Their finale, blending African-sounding rhythms with Hindi lyrics, invited audience participation, ending in a standing ovation.

However, the night reached its zenith with Swarathma, Thavil Raja, and the Beat Gurus. Their performance made the audience rise from their cushioned seats and applaud and dance, thanks to a thrilling mix of global percussion. 'Duur Kinara' fused African drums and horns, while Sanjeev Nayak's violin pierced through the powerful rhythms. Vasu Dixit's invitation for the audience to howl during 'Koorane' added to the electric energy, further enhanced by Thavil Raja's masterful solo. The spotlight shone on each percussionist, showcasing their brilliance. 'Pyaar Ke Rang' saw Vasu descend from the stage, joining the audience in a joyous frenzy of song and dance.

Fitting climax

After this crowd-pleasing performance, the legendary Vikku Vinayakram graced the stage for a phenomenal final act, accompanying his ghatam symphony, which included V. Selvaganesh, who won a Grammy this year. It was a fitting climax to a dazzling night of world-class percussion.

The festival, which resumes on Sunday at the same venue, will feature three performances: Rhythms of India, 'Ashtanayika - Kal Aur Aaj', and Taufiq Qureshi's Surya.

The Mahindra Percussion Festival, in association with *The Hindu*, is co-sponsored by Mahindra Finance, Paul John Visitor Centre, and Carlsberg Smooth Soda and promoted and produced by Hyperlink Brand Solutions.

Police raid houses of habitual offenders

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

In a special drive, the city police carried out surprise checks on the residences of rowdies and habitual offenders across the city as part of a precautionary measure ahead of the Lok Sabha elections.

The South division police conducted the drive and as many as 234 houses were checked and over 150 rowdies were questioned. Some of the houses raided belonged to rowdies who are now lodged in the central prison. Similarly, the West division police searched the residences of 326 rowdies and 231 habitual offenders for any contraband and weapons. Many were questioned and an undertaking was obtained stating that they would not be involved in any anti-social activities during the elections.

A similar exercise was carried out by the Central division police where over 200 policemen carried out search operations on the residences of 100 rowdies and habitual offenders.

Interactive session to celebrate Women's Day

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Soundarya Institute of Management and Science College on Thursday celebrated International Women's Day. An interactive session with achievers was organised as part of the celebrations.

How to bridge the cultural gap, how to understand women's role in society, and increasing women's representation in politics – these were are some of the topics discussed during the interactive session.

On professionalism

Kannada film actor Priyanka Upendra, who inaugurated the event, said "naari shakti" (women's power) has been recognised in India since time immemorial as women have always been a source of inspiration. "But there is less opportunity and convenience for women in the film field. This needs to be overcome by infusing professionalism," she said. Director of Karnataka Chitrakala Parishath and UNESCO nominated member Choodamani Nandagopal said women need to develop special skills and professionalism to prove their mettle and worth in various walks of life.

The Lawrence School
Lovedale, Ootacamund - 643003, The Nilgiris (TN)
Phone: 0423-2442552, 2441696
Website: www.thelawrenceschool.org

Sealed tenders are invited for the supply of School Uniforms, including fabric and stitching, to the school for the period from 01.07.2024 to 30.06.2027.

Prescribed tender forms, containing all necessary details, can be obtained from the School office or downloaded from our website www.thelawrenceschool.org/tenders upon payment of Rs. 1180/-. Additionally, a sum of Rs. 5000.00 is required to be paid as Earnest Money Deposit (refundable).

Tenders must reach the school office no later than 3:00 p.m. on 06.04.2024.

The successful tenderer will be required to pay a Refundable Security Deposit of Rs.1,00,000/- upon acceptance of the contract.

HEADMASTER

INCOME TAX DEPARTMENT

GENERAL INFORMATION TO PUBLIC

This is to inform that the Income Tax Department has opened a Control Room at Bengaluru which is functioning 24X7 hours till the Date of Polling (i.e., 07.05.2024), exclusively for upcoming Lok Sabha Elections- 2024. Any complaint regarding distribution of cash, freebies or any inducement by any person or parties can be shared with the department by contacting the below mentioned phone numbers or through the e-mail. The names and details of the persons who are sharing information will be kept confidential. All citizens are requested to make use of this facility and share the genuine information.

Toll Free Number : 1800-425-2115
Telephone Number : 080-22862324
Fax Number : 080-22866916
Mobile Numbers (with WhatsApp) : 82774 22825, 82774 13614
E-mail: generalelections2024karnataka@incometax.gov.in

Nodal Officer, Lok Sabha Elections, Karnataka
& Addl. Commissioner of Income Tax, Central Range-1
3rd Floor, C.R Building, Queen's Road,
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State knocks on SC door seeking drought relief from Union govt.

Centre's hostility towards State's farmers is deliberate and therefore we approached apex court seeking justice: CM

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

As repeated appeals seeking funds under the National Disaster Response Fund (NDRF) from the Centre have not yielded results, the Congress government in Karnataka has filed a petition in the Supreme Court against the Union government for denying financial assistance for drought management in the State.

The move is expected to trigger a fresh political debate in the run-up to the two-phase Lok Sabha elections in the State. Earlier too, Karnataka raised the issue of "discrimination" by the Centre in devolution of funds, clearances to projects and financial assistance for schemes.

"We cannot be mute spectators when the farmers are in distress. The Centre's hostility towards the State's people and farmers is deliberate and therefore we approached the apex court seeking justice," Chief Minister Siddaramaiah told reporters here on Saturday.

Tomato plants that have dried up owing to lack of water at Sidlaghatta in Chickballapur district. A total of 223 out of 236 taluks have been notified as drought-affected in the State. BHAGYA PRAKASH K.

Under Article 32

The State has approached the Supreme Court under Article 32 for enforcement of fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution to seek directions from the court to the Centre for release of funds under the NDRF, the Chief Minister said.

A total 223 out of 236 taluks were notified as drought-affected. The agriculture and horticulture crop loss during kharif 2023 has been reported in over 48 lakh hectares with the estimated loss of ₹35,162 crore. The government has sought ₹18,171.44 crore from the Centre under NDRF.

"The present drought situation has damaged crops, affected livestock, leading to lower yields, reduced income for farmers, increased food prices and increased shortage of water in urban and rural areas as well due to reduced ground water level and shortage or no water storage in lakes as well as reservoirs. The overall socio-economic scenario is in distress and is evident from the relief measures being undertaken to mitigate fodder shortage and drinking water scarcities," the petition said.

"Step-motherly treatment has been meted out to the State. The Centre totally failed to discharge its humanitarian, moral, legal responsibilities," said the Chief Minister, who had met Prime Minister Narendra Modi and sought release of funds. "The State annually pays ₹4.3 lakh crore to the Centre in the form of taxes, but our State receives less than the funds given to Gujarat."

"As all our efforts failed and there is no other alternative, we have approached the Supreme Court. A crisis has arisen between the Centre and the State," the Chief Minister said.

Central team's visit

The petition from Karnataka stated, "Under the Manual for Drought Management, the Union government is required to take a final decision on the assistance to the State from the NDRF within a month of the receipt of the Inter-Ministerial Central Team (IMCT)." The IMCT had visited drought-affected districts from October 4 to 9, 2023 and made a comprehensive assessment of drought situation in the State. The IMCT submitted its report to the sub-committee of the National Executive Committee constituted under the Disaster Management Act. But the Union government has not taken a final decision on the assistance to the State from the NDRF.

"It is inaction on part of the Union government to act on the report and take a final decision to release financial assistance to the State is illegal, arbitrary, and violative of fundamental rights guaranteed to its citizens under Article 14 and Article 21 of the Constitution of India," the State's petition said.

Noting the steps taken for handling drought, the Chief Minister said the State government has released ₹633.5 crore to 33.44 lakh farmers' bank accounts. A sum of ₹327 crore had been released to supply drinking water. Except Bengaluru, water was being supplied to 309 locations and 781 private borewells have been hired for supplying water, the Chief Minister said.

EC on high alert as pre-poll seizures during 2023 Assembly election had crossed ₹733 crore

Afshan Yasmeen
BENGALURU

With the 2023 Karnataka Assembly election having gained notoriety for being powered by big money, the Election Commission is on high alert in this election.

Since August last year, in the run-up to the Lok Sabha election, poll personnel have already seized cash and other goods worth ₹537 crore in Karnataka. The seizures include ₹151 crore in cash, liquor worth ₹42 crore, drugs worth ₹126 crore, gold worth ₹71 crore and other items valued at ₹144 crore. Besides, the Election Commission has seized ₹43.62 crore from March 16, when the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) came into force, till date.

During the Assembly polls of 2023, the total pre-poll seizures in Karnataka, including cash, liquor, drugs, and precious metals, had touched a whopping ₹733.43 crore till the day of election on May 10. This is excluding ₹288.25 crore worth confiscations by the Enforcement Directorate.

Six times higher

This was over six times higher than what was recorded during the 2018 Assembly polls when ₹115. 91 crore had been seized. In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, ₹88.27 crore was seized, according to data from the Election Commission.

In fact, the 2023 Assembly election seizures are over ₹400 crore more than the pre-poll seizures made in the previous four elections in Karnataka. While ₹14.42 crore was seized in 2013 Assembly polls, ₹28.08 crore was confiscated in the 2014 Lok Sabha polls, ₹185.74 crore in the 2018 Assembly polls and ₹88.27 crore in 2019 Lok Sabha polls.

Officials of the static surveillance team checking vehicles at the election check-post put up on Raja Rammohan Roy Road in Bengaluru on March 18. K. MURALI KUMAR

Seizures

From August 2023 till March 14, 2024

- Cash and other goods worth **₹537 crore**
- Cash seized: **₹151 crore**
- Liquor: Worth **₹42 crore**
- Drugs: Worth **₹126 crore**
- Gold: Worth **₹71 crore**
- Other items : Valued at **₹144 crore**

Seizures made since March 16 when MCC came into force: Cash and other goods worth **₹43.62 crore**

Of the ₹733.43 crore, the highest seizures were made by the Departments of Commercial Taxes, Police, Excise and Income Tax. A major portion of the total seizures, including cash, liquor, drugs, and precious metals were made in Bengaluru Urban followed by Chikkamagaluru and Shivamogga.

Vigilance, monitoring

Venkatesh Kumar R., Additional Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) in Karnataka, told *The Hindu*, "This time the bar has further been raised for ensuring inducement-free elections. While banks have been instructed by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to provide information on any suspicious digital transactions at the district level, there will be strict enforcement activity by various agencies."

Pointing out that distribution of freebies was rampant in 2023, Mr. Kumar said, "The two largest freebie hauls that were seized were from Bengaluru and Shivamogga. While freebies worth ₹5.5 crore were seized in Shivamogga, a consignment of freebies worth ₹3.6 crore was seized in Byatarayanapura in Bengaluru," Mr. Kumar said.

"Besides, weed worth ₹120 crore was seized in Rajahmundry in Andhra Pradesh. We had information that part of this consignment was to be transported to Karnataka," he said.

Flying squads

"This time we have 2,357 flying squads, 2,669 static surveillance teams, 257 video viewing teams, 647 video surveillance teams and 258 accounting teams. Of the total 900 checkposts, as many as 172 have been set up at inter-State borders to track the movement and distribution of goods and monetary transactions. Apart from this, 40 Excise checkposts, 19 Forest checkposts, and 15 Transport checkposts have also been set up in the State border," he added.

Modi has failed to bring in *achche din* and double farmers' income: CM

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar and other leaders at a guarantee committee members' meeting in Bengaluru on Saturday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday hit out at Prime Minister Narendra Modi for his failure to bring in *achche din* and double farmers' income during the last one decade.

Mr. Siddaramaiah and his deputy and KPCC chief D.K. Shivakumar participated in the State, district and taluk-level guarantee committee members meeting at the party office and said the Congress had, on the contrary, responded to the grievances of the people by implementing five guarantees.

'Stolen guarantees'

The Chief Minister alleged that the Prime Minister had "stolen the State's guarantees" and renamed it "Modi Guarantee" during the run-up to the elections to the Lok Sabha. Mr. Modi rolled out "a bundle of lies" during the two terms, he alleged.

The Congress guarantee reached the beneficiaries of all castes and religions. Despite paying taxes of ₹4.5 lakh crore annually to the Centre, the State has been getting in return only ₹50,000 crore and the BJP and JD (S) leaders have been "dancing" to the tune of the NDA government at the Centre and justified denial of the State's share by the latter.

Counter to price rise

Mr. Shivakumar said that the guarantee schemes have alleviated the burden of price rise and inflation on the people. "We introduced the guarantee schemes looking at the plight of people due to price rise and inflation".

While the Gruhalakshmi scheme has benefitted 1.33 crore women, the Gruha Jyothi scheme benefitted 1.5 crore households.

"The Congress party always believed in putting money in the hands of the people. We have earmarked ₹56,000 crore for implementing five guarantees, which will directly go to the people," he added.

State-level Guarantee Implementation Committee chairman H.M. Revanna, vice-chairperson Pushpa Amarnath, and other committee members attended the meeting.

Deve Gowda writes to EC, seeks transfer of Hassan Deputy Commissioner

The Hindu Bureau
SHIVAMOGGA

Former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda has written to the Chief Election Commissioner demanding the transfer of Hassan Deputy Commissioner C. Sathyabhama, alleging that she raised funds from government officials for a programme attended by Chief Minister Siddaramaiah recently.

Mr. Deve Gowda, in his letter on March 20, alleged that the DC was a confidant of Cooperation Minister K.N. Rajanna, who is also Minister in-charge of Hassan district. Both belonged to the "same community", he said.

The officer always functioned as per the directions of the Minister, he alleged.

Further, he said, the Hassan district administration under the leadership of the Deputy Commissioner collected funds from government departments for the public function, held on March 1. Chief Minister Siddaramaiah attended the programme.

Reply sought

Based on the complaint, the commission wrote to the officer seeking her reply on March 21. She was asked to submit a report along with her reply to the complaint within 24 hours.

When *The Hindu* contacted the officer on Saturday, the Deputy Commissioner said she gave a reply within 24 hours. However, she refused to share the contents of her reply.

Appointed to KPCC campaign committee

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The All-India Congress Committee (AICC) has appointed four State leaders as working presidents of the KPCC campaign committee during the Lok Sabha elections. The working presidents are: Tanvir Sait and Vinay Kulkarni, MLAs; G.C. Chandrashekar, MP; Manjunath Bhandary, MLC; and leader from Raichur district Vasanth Kumar.

Former Minister Vinay Kumar Sorake has been appointed chairman, former MP D.L. Hanumanthaiah as co-chairman, and MLA Rizwan Arshad as the vice-chairman of the campaign committee of the KPCC, according to a press release issued here.

Gubbi MLA's statement raises eyebrows

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The statement of Congress MLA from Gubbi S.R. Srinivas at an election meeting in Tumakuru district has raised eyebrows.

Campaigning on behalf of Congress candidate for Tumakuru S.P. Mudduhanume Gowda, Mr. Srinivas appealed to voters to elect a maximum number of Congress MPs, failing which "Chief Minister Siddaramaiah will have to resign taking moral responsibility for the party's bad performance."

Close to DKS

Given that Mr. Srinivas, formerly with JD(S), is perceived to be close to KPCC president and Deputy Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar, this statement has again led to speculations about leadership change after the Lok Sabha elections. Following this incident, several BJP leaders stated that it yet again underlines the divisions within the Congress.

OBITUARY & REMEMBRANCE

DEATH

RAMAMURTHY K
31/12/1935 to 16/03/2024
10th day rituals on 25th March 2024
Became one with the Almighty after living 88 glorious years. A wonderful Thatha, Appa, Husband and a great human. Has nurtured 4 generations. An ardent Carnatic music lover & a cricket fanatic with a unique sense of humour, sharing classic Thatha jokes.
Deeply missed by
Wife (Jayalakshmi), Daughters, Sons in law, Son, Grandsons, Granddaughter, Granddaughter in law, Great grandson & Great granddaughter.
Contact: 9789099551

DEATH

GOPALAKRISHNAN NAIR (75yrs), Retired Senior Assistant Editor, The Hindu Businessline, Kochi passed away on 23-03-2024. Address: Siva Lokam, Puthuseri Bhagam, Maharshikavv, Vayala PO, M C Road, Adoor, Pathanamthitta - 691554. Contact: 89210 54043.

DEATH ANNIVERSARIES

Loving Memory

P.S.RAM CHANDER
02.06.1948 to 24.03.2002
You are always our Inspiration. Thoughts of you give us direction in life. Love you papa.
-Devoted Wife, Son & Daughter

PUBLIC NOTICE

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT, Sri. Siddu K. Savadi alias Siddappa K. Savadi, S/o Late-Kalappa, Residing at. "Mathoshri Nilaya", Basava Nagara, Asangi Road, Banahatti, Bagalakote- 587 311 is the absolute owner of the property described in the Schedule hereunder.

It is brought to the notice of the general public that, our client Mr. Subramani. M. S, S/o Late- Shivasingh.H, Re/at. No.97, Sai Krishna Building, 2nd Cross, ITI Layout, Near Ayyappa Temple, Mangammana Palya, Bommanahalli Post, Bangalore South- 560 068 has negotiated and decided to purchase the Schedule Property from the above said owner. All persons having any claims against to the Schedule Property or any part thereof by way of inheritance, mortgage, sale, conveyance, MOU, Agreement to Sell, Joint Development Agreement, G.P.A, transfer, lease deed, tenancy, license, lien, charge, trust, maintenance, easement, gift, exchange, possession, adverse possession or otherwise howsoever are hereby required to submit the same in writing along with documentary proof to the undersigned at their office **within 10 days from the date of publication hereof**, failing which our client shall proceed without any reference to such claim and the same, if any, will be considered as waived.

SCHEDULE PROPERTY

All that piece and parcel of the immovable Residential Property vacant bearing **Site No. 1439/C,** in the Layout formed by the Bangalore Development Authority (BDA), situated at 7th Sector, HSR Layout, Bangalore, Measuring East to West: 15.00 Meters and North to South: 24.30 Meters, in all measuring 364.50 Square Meters, together with all appurtances whatsoever whether underneath or above the surface, Now comes under the Jurisdiction of Bruhut Bengaluru Mahanagara palike (BBMP) Limits, Bengaluru., vide katha No. 1224/1439/C and bounded on the;

East by : Site No.1439/B
West by : Site No.1439D
North by : Road
South by : Site Nos.1461/F & 1461/G

Dated this 23rd day of March 2024 at Bangalore

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Phone: 080-65555914
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KARNATAKA GOVERNMENT STOCK (SECURITIES)
Finance Department
Vidhana Soudha, Bengaluru.

1. Aggregate Amount: **Total Rs.3000 Crore, ((Rs.1000 Crore-08 Year Tenure) and Rs.2000 Crore (09 Year Tenure))**
2. Method of Issue : By auction, through PDO, RBI, Mumbai (Fort).
3. Date of Auction : **March 26, 2024.**

Government of Karnataka invites subscription to the above securities. Copies of the Notification and Application forms may be obtained from PDO, RBI, Bengaluru. Non-competitive bidding facility has been introduced by RBI to encourage participation of retail investors. The Government stock up to 10% of the notified amount of the sale will be allotted to eligible individuals and institutions. Sample Tender Forms and the revised scheme of Non-competitive bidding facility is available on the website **www.rbi.org.in**

Sd/- (Dr. P. C. Jaffer)
Secretary to Government
DIPR/CP/RO/4397/2023-24 **(Budget & Resources), Finance Department**

PUBLIC NOTICE

The public, in general, is hereby informed that my clients, Smt. Swapna Kumari C., W/o Maruthi Reddy M. H. and Sri.Maruthi Reddy M. H., S/o K. A. Hanumanthareddy intend to purchase a residential vacant site property, situated in Bangalore North Taluk, Yelahanka Hobli, Kodigehalli, Sahakaranagara division, bearing site No.1766 and BBMP Katha number 201/1766, measuring East to West 30 feet and North to South 45 feet, which is owned and possessed by the Smt. Aswini Krishnan D/o Late E. Krishnan.

Hence, any person having any rights, title, claim, or interest in the said property, whether through sale or sale agreement (registered or unregistered), inheritance, possession, succession, will, mortgage, lien, lease, gift, GPA or civil court dispute or any other means, must communicate their objection in writing to the undersigned with supporting documents within 7 (seven) days from the date of publication of this notice. Failure to do so will result in the waiver or abandonment of such claims. Furthermore, my client will proceed to conclude the negotiations, and no further claims will be entertained thereafter. My client will continue with the registration sale deed in respect of the aforementioned vacant site property in accordance with the agreed-upon terms by the parties.

Date: 24th March, 2024

PRAVEEN KUMAR H. B., ADVOCATE
Office at: No.2, Janak Residency, Kumara Krupa Main Road, Madhavanagar, Bangalore-01. Ph.9886298492 and 9513951400

INBRIEF

BJP complains to EC against Priyank Kharge

Bharatiya Janata Party MLC Chalavadi Narayanaswamy on Friday filed a complaint with the EC against RDPR Minister Priyank Kharge for his social media post that referred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah in an allegedly derogatory manner. In a post on X, Mr. Kharge questioned the timing of the action taken by the Central agencies against Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal. "The IT/ED raids and arrests of opposition leaders are nothing but BJP's standard operating procedures to distract the public from real issues," he had said and then gone on to indirectly refer to Mr. Modi and Mr. Shah in 'derogatory' language.

BRS looking at legal options to revert its name to TRS

The Bharat Rashtra Samiti (BRS) is exploring legal options to revert its name to Telangana Rashtra Samiti (TRS) to regain its identity. Former MP and former vice-chairman of the Telangana State Planning Board Boinpally Vinod Kumar said the party was looking at the demand from the cadre who feel the change from TRS to BRS has stolen the soul of the party.

Our alliance will win 24 Lok Sabha seats in A.P., says Naidu

TDP national president N. Chandrababu Naidu has exuded confidence that the TDP-BJP-Jana Sena Party (JSP) alliance will win more than 160 Assembly and at least 24 out of 25 Lok Sabha (LS) seats in Andhra Pradesh, and the BJP-led NDA alliance at the Centre 400+seats in the general election. Mr. Naidu reiterated that the three parties forged the alliance with the aim to liberate people from the clutches of YSR Congress Party and no other selfish motive.

Kerala moves SC as President withholds assent for 4 Bills

The State government also files appeal against Governor Arif Mohammed Khan's office for keeping the Bills pending for a long time and later reserving them for President's consideration

K S Sudhi
KOCHI

In an unprecedented move, the Kerala government on Saturday filed an appeal in the Supreme Court as President Droupadi Murmu has withheld assent for four Bills passed by the Kerala Legislature without disclosing any reasons.

It has also moved the Court against Kerala Governor Arif Mohammed Khan's office for keeping the Bills pending for a long and indefinite period, and later reserving them for the consideration of the President.

Droupadi Murmu

The act of the President in withholding the assent for the four Bills without giving any reason was highly arbitrary and in violation of Articles 14, 200 and 201 of the Constitution. The reference of the seven Bills to the President has to be recalled on the grounds of Constitutional morality, the State has argued.

The State has listed the Secretary to the President, the Kerala Governor and the Additional Chief Secretary to the Governor as respondents in the writ petition filed before the Supreme Court.

Kerala would be represented in the top court by a senior lawyer, specialising in Constitutional matters and C.K. Sasi, its Standing Counsel.

'Grave encroachment'

The State contends that the actions of the Union government in advising the President to withhold assent to Bills passed by the Legislative Assembly 11 to 24 months back, which were wholly within the domain of the State government, subverted and disrupted the federal structure of the Constitution. It was also a grave encroachment into the domain entrusted to the State under the Constitution, it argued.

The Governor, who reserved the seven Bills, avoided a decision from the Supreme Court by bundling up seven of the eight pending Bills and referring them to the President. The actions of the Governor lacked *bona fides* and were not in good faith.

The reservation of the Bills by the Governor after keeping them pending for up to 24 months was a deliberate attempt to avoid carrying out his constitutional duty and functions under Article 200 of the Constitution. Hence the reference of the Bills to the President has to be held to be unconstitutional, the State would argue.

T.M. Krishna being targeted owing to his progressive thinking, says Stalin

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI

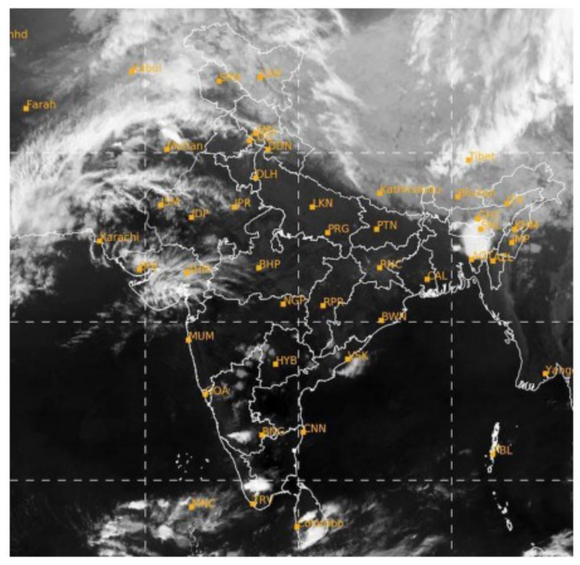
Chief Minister M.K. Stalin on Saturday congratulated Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna on his selection for the Music Academy's Sangita Kalanidhi award for 2024.

In a statement on X (formerly Twitter), he said that Mr. Krishna was being targeted by a section of people because of his progressive political stance and continuous support for the poor. "It is unfair to criticise Thanthai Periyar [E.V. Ramasamy], who fought for humanity and equality for women for over 75 years. Anyone who reads about the history and the teachings of Periyar and his selfless contribution will never attempt to cast slanderous mud on him," he said. He added, "Mr. Krishna's talent is undeniable. Do not mix petty politics in music, like how it was mixed in religious beliefs. The need of the day is to have a broad vision for humanity."

Mr. Stalin's statement comes after some Harikatha exponents and Carnatic vocalists, including Ranjani and Gayathri, opposed Mr. Krishna's selection and announced that they were skipping the annual conference of the Academy, this year. "It is dangerous to overlook Mr. Krishna's glorification of a figure like EVR, aka Periyar," the vocalist duo posted on social media. TNCC president K. Selvaperunthagai congratulated Mr. Krishna. He said the award was being conferred on him for his incredible music talent and progressive thinking, and condemned those who attempt to "create confusion".

WEATHERWATCH

Rainfall, temperature & air quality in select metros yesterday



TEMPERATURE DATA: IMD, POLLUTION DATA: CPCB, MAP: INSAT/IMD (TAKEN AT 20.00 HRS)

Forecast for Sunday: Thunderstorm with lightning/gusty winds likely at isolated places over Rajasthan, Sikkim and Sub-Himalayan West Bengal. Heat wave likely in isolated pockets of Saurashtra & Kutch

CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN	CITY	RAIN	MAX	MIN
Agartala	—	32.2	19.3	Kozhikode	—	36.5	27.8
Ahmedabad	—	38.3	23.0	Kurnool	—	40.5	25.7
Aizawl	—	29.9	14.0	Lucknow	—	34.4	17.9
Allahabad	—	35.3	16.6	Madurai	—	38.0	25.2
Bengaluru	—	34.6	21.3	Mangaluru	—	34.6	24.6
Bhopal	—	38.4	17.8	Mumbai	—	32.6	22.5
Bhubaneswar	—	36.2	22.8	Mysuru	—	35.0	22.0
Chandigarh	—	32.3	17.9	New Delhi	—	34.1	16.2
Chennai	—	34.0	25.8	Patna	—	32.0	18.6
Coimbatore	—	36.4	24.4	Port Blair	—	32.3	25.6
Dehradun	—	29.8	15.2	Puducherry	—	34.0	25.0
Gangtok	6.3	12.6	9.8	Pune	—	38.0	20.8
Goa	—	32.8	25.5	Raipur	—	37.2	21.8
Guwahati	—	28.6	17.4	Ranchi	—	32.6	15.4
Hubballi	—	37.0	23.0	Shillong	—	18.4	8.0
Hyderabad	—	37.5	23.6	Shimla	—	23.8	12.8
Imphal	—	27.3	10.8	Srinagar	1	19.5	6.5
Jaipur	—	36.7	20.0	Thiruvananthapuram	46	33.2	24.2
Kochi	—	33.2	26.8	Tiruchi	—	37.1	25.4
Kohima	—	14.0	9.6	Vijayawada	—	36.6	24.4
Kolkata	—	34.0	20.4	Visakhapatnam	—	32.6	25.1

(Rainfall data in mm; temperature in Celsius)

Pollutants in the air you are breathing

CITIES	SO_2	NO_2	CO	PM2.5	PM10	CODE
Ahmedabad	.18	145	.60	...105	98	
Bengaluru	.22	..12	.85	72	...101	
Chennai	...3	9	.75	...117	...101	
Delhi	.19	..66	.32	...269	...308	
Hyderabad	...4	..33	.42	66	...121	
Kolkata	.19	..56	.19	96	...108	
Lucknow	.10	..24	.86	...203	...125	
Mumbai	..—	..21	.30	...258	...105	
Pune	.98	134	115	74	84	
Visakhapatnam	.11	..42	.23	51	83	

Yesterday

In observation made at 4.00 p.m., Jalna, Maharashtra recorded an overall air quality index (AQI) score of 296 indicating an unhealthy level of pollution. In contrast, Dharwad, Karnataka recorded a healthy AQI score of 27

Air Quality Code: Poor | Moderate | Good (Readings indicate average AQI)

SO_2: Sulphur Dioxide. Short-term exposure can harm the respiratory system, making breathing difficult. It can affect visibility by reacting with other air particles to form haze and stain culturally important objects such as statues and monuments.

NO_2: Nitrogen Dioxide. Aggravates respiratory illness, causes haze to form by reacting with other air particles, causes acid rain, pollutes coastal waters.

CO: Carbon monoxide. High concentration in air reduces oxygen supply to critical organs like the heart and brain. At very high levels, it can cause dizziness, confusion, unconsciousness and even death.

PM2.5 & PM10: Particulate matter pollution can cause irritation of the eyes, nose and throat, coughing, chest tightness and shortness of breath, reduced lung function, irregular heartbeat, asthma attacks, heart attacks and premature death in people with heart or lung disease

In disguise

Seeking blessings: Men dressed as women taking part in the annual 'Chamayavilakku' (traditional lamp) ritual of Chavara Kottankulangara Sree Devi Temple in Kollam on Saturday. Men take part in the event as a symbol of their devotion for the presiding deity. C. SURESHKUMAR

Karnataka halts Goa-Tamnar power line project to save Western Ghat forests

R. Krishna Kumar
MYSURU

In a major boost for environment and forest conservation, the Government of Karnataka has rejected the proposal for Goa-Tamnar power project recommended by its own officials.

Minister for Forest, Ecology and Environment Eshwar Khandre has not only rejected the proposal of its senior personnel in the Forest Department to divert forest land in favour of power lines, but also issued notices to the officials concerned and sought an explanation from them for their stance.

A communique issued by the ministry to the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests and Head of Forest Forces dated March 16, 2024, states that the proposed diversion of forests should be rejected and the powerlines should be realigned along non-forest areas.

It also states that in future, such proposals should be treated with caution at the preliminary stage itself, given the imperatives of conservation and forest protection for posterity.

Continuing, the communique directed the PCCF to issue notices and seek explanations from officials who had recommended the diversion of forest land despite the project entailing large-scale felling of trees and forest destruction.

What the project is

The Goa-Tamnar power project entailed drawing 400 kV D/C Quad Transmission Line and the project authorities had sought the diversion of 174.652 hectares of forest land in Dharwad, Haliyal, Dandeli Wildlife and Belagavi division. The transmission line was to connect the existing power grid in Narendra in Dharwad district to Xeldem in Goa and the length of the transmission line was 94 km out of which 72 km of the line was to pass through Karnataka forests including 6.6 km of the line through Anshi-Dandeli tiger reserve.

The DCF of Belagavi division rejected the project as the forest land falls in the Western Ghats with rare and endangered species. The official also said that if permission was given to the project, there will be more damage to the biodiversity of the area and affect the eco-system of Western Ghats apart from bifurcating the entire landscape. However, officials of Dharwad, Haliyal, and Dandeli gave their consent and estimated that about 35% of the nearly 73,000 trees estimated were to be felled.

Welcoming the developments, Giridhar Kulkarni, wildlife conservationist, said the decision taken by the Forest Minister and the State government to reject the proposal is a positive move and was in the interest of wildlife conservation in the districts of Belagavi and Uttara Kannada.

Mr. Kulkarni had written to the authorities that the removal of native vegetation would result in the fragmentation of forests, degradation and loss of wildlife habitat apart from disturbing the functioning of the watershed besides causing human-animal conflict in the region.

"This is a big relief for us as I had submitted multiple representations to the authorities to reject the proposal," said Mr. Kulkarni, describing the Forest Minister's initiative as a "bold move".

Family of girl who died after fall from school terrace seeks probe

The Hindu Bureau
KOTTAYAM

Nearly two months after the tragic death of Gianna Ann, a four-year-old girl from Manimala, following a fall from the terrace of a pre-school building in Bengaluru, her parents are planning to approach the court seeking the transfer of the investigation to the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) of the Karnataka Police.

Gianna, the elder daughter of Jito Tomy Joseph and Benitta Thomas, passed away on January 22, three days after the incident.

The Hennur police had filed charges against Principal of Delhi Preschool Thomas Cherian and staff for alleged negligence resulting in her death.

Two months on, the grieving family continues to seek justice for their child. The accused principal, who initially evaded arrest, has since been released on bail.

Expressing dissatisfaction at the pace of the investigation, Ms. Thomas said, "We are in constant touch with the police, but they cite the need for forensic report before taking further action."

The family also alleges that the police have overlooked the role of a school caretaker in the girl's demise despite their repeated complaints. Additionally, the school authorities have been uncooperative in providing access to CCTV footage from the campus of the day of the incident.

"While medical professionals have confirmed Gianna's injuries resulted from a fall, it seems the State police have unnoticed this crucial evidence," she added.

Meanwhile, the couple, who are employed in the IT sector, has relocated to their native place in Kerala.

They are also planning to approach the court seeking a CID probe into the incident.

A social media campaign titled 'Justice for Gianna' too has been launched in this connection.

IDBI Bank seeks CBI probe into misappropriation of around ₹6 crore

Sharath S. Srivatsa
Raghava M.
BENGALURU/MANGALURU

In an intriguing case that has many twists and turns, an Income Tax search in Mangaluru recently, which led to the seizure of ₹5 crore belonging to IDBI Bank, has ended with the bank seeking a CBI investigation into the episode.

The case unfolded in mid-December 2023, when Income Tax sleuths swooped down on a business establishment near Kankanady where a currency-laden vehicle carrying ₹5 crore had come to deliver money from IDBI Bank.

The I-T investigation revealed that the businessman at whose premises the vehicle had arrived was not connected with the transaction, and the money was meant to reach another person, who is a regular customer of the bank.

Questioning of the customer revealed that though he had sought a loan against gold that was in the locker of the Kankanady branch of IDBI Bank, he had not completed the application process.

Also, there was no explanation for the currency laden vehicle arriving where it did even while the transaction itself was incomplete.

According to I-T officials, bank officials also could not establish through documents the purpose for which the cash had been withdrawn.

The customer went to the police station, accusing two bank officials of not returning the gold that he had pledged. The customer, who has a long standing relationship with the bank, complained to the police that the Manager and Assistant Manager had cheated him.

Pledged gold

In his complaint to the Mangaluru South police in the third week of December, he accused the bank of not releasing 1.9 kg of gold that he had pledged. He also accused the bank of debiting ₹61 lakh from his overdraft (OD) account without his consent.

Mangaluru police told *The Hindu* that the customer was asked to pledge gold when he sought ₹6 crore loan. While the customer brought 1.9 kg of gold, a bank employee removed ₹5 crore from the bank's vault and transported the cash, which was intercepted by I-T officials.

The police say that the bank has accused its employee of conniving with the customer.

On the run

The two bank employees are on the run following rejection of their anticipatory bail application by the sessions court in Mangaluru.

The cheating case of the bank customer has been transferred from Mangaluru South police station to the Cybercrime, Economic Offences and Narcotics police station, since the amount involved is over ₹25 lakh.

IDBI Bank has written to the CBI, requesting the agency to investigate the case that involves misappropriation of around ₹6 crore.

Despite multiple attempts by *The Hindu* to elicit a response, IDBI Bank refused to comment on this case.

From Page One

BJP made 'bribes' legal via poll bonds: Congress

However, the Congress did not reveal the names of the companies that were involved in these contracts or which allegedly donated electoral bonds to the BJP. "We are not blaming the companies but pointing out the system," Mr. Ramesh said, trying to make the point that the Congress understands the importance of the private sector in raising India's GDP.

He also alleged that 41 corporate groups have faced a total of 56 raids by the Enforcement Directorate (ED), the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI), or the Income Tax department. These corporate groups have given ₹2,592 crore to the BJP, of which ₹1,853 crore was given after the raids against them.

Bonds linked to project clearances by BRS govt.

The BRS government gave a Letter of Acceptance (LoA) to the IRB Infra on April 27, 2023, leasing it for 30 years for maintenance. The firm bought bonds for ₹25 crore on July 4, 2023, and the BRS encashed them on July 13. The bond purchase came just a few weeks after the LoA was given, leading to suspicion that the bonds were a gift. Similarly, the second unit of Kerala's Kitex Garments was established in Ranga Reddy district on September 28, 2023, and Kitex Childrenwear bought bonds for ₹10 crore on October 12 and the BRS encashed the same on October 16. The same company had started its first unit in Warangal and the BRS government announced on June 16, 2023, that the unit would become operational. After three weeks on July 5, the company bought ₹15 crore bonds and the same were encashed by the BRS on July 17.

From pharmaceutical drugmakers, healthcare providers, infrastructure as well as realty developers to those in educational services, several companies across industries in Telangana and Andhra Pradesh had purchased electoral bonds that were encashed by different political parties.

The bonds were not just for the political party in power but also for parties that were not even principal Opposition, albeit the sum vastly differed, with relatively smaller amounts for some recipients.

Infrastructure developer Megha Group, through several group firms, had emerged as the largest purchaser of electoral bonds from the region - for ₹1,186 crore, which it donated to several parties. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) got the most at ₹584 crore while some of the other recipients were the BRS (₹195 crore), DMK (₹85 crore), YSRCP (₹37 crore); TDP (₹28 crore) and the Congress, which got ₹22.5 crore.

Recipients of the bonds bought by pharma major Dr. Reddy's Laboratories were the BRS, which got ₹32 crore; BJP ₹25 crore; Congress ₹14 crore; and TDP ₹13 crore.

According to the data, Natco Pharma, another well-known name in pharma industry from Hyderabad, purchased more than ₹69 crore worth electoral bonds that were encashed by the BRS, BJP, TDP, Congress, JanaSena Party and the YSRCP.

The BRS emerged as the fourth largest receiver of funds from the electoral bonds in the country pushing aside some of the biggest national parties. The party received donations to the tune of ₹1,322 crore through the bonds and more than half of the donations – worth ₹663 crore – were received in just four days.

Approver in Delhi liquor policy case is BJP's star donor: AAP

Businessman Sarath Chandra Reddy donated over ₹55 crore to the BJP through electoral bonds, mostly after his arrest in the case, notes AAP leader Atishi; party calls for ED to arrest BJP leaders since the 'money trail leads right back to them'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Saturday demanded that the Enforcement Directorate (ED) make the BJP an accused in the Delhi liquor policy case as the money trail that the agency has been looking for has been found and it leads to the coffers of the BJP in the form of electoral bonds. Hence, the ED should arrest top BJP leaders, including party president J.P. Nadda, the AAP said.

Addressing a press conference, senior AAP leader Atishi said the entire case against Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is based on the statements of accused-turned-approvers.

Ms. Atishi said that for the last two years, the ED and the CBI had been investigating the fake Delhi liquor scam, conducting over 500 raids and questioning over 1,000 witnesses but did not find a single piece of evidence or recovery of money to show any wrongdoing by the AAP or its Ministers.

AAP leader Atishi leads a protest against the arrest of Arvind Kejriwal, in Delhi on Saturday. AP

However, in its remand application on Saturday for the arrest Mr. Kejriwal, the ED's lawyer read out the statement of their prime witness and approver, Sarath Chandra Reddy, who said he was a part of the 'South Group' that paid bribes to obtain liquor business in Delhi.

"There is no evidence, it is only a statement. It was only on the basis of this statement that the ED got remand of Mr. Kejriwal for six days. It is important to understand who Mr. Reddy is and how the money trail leads to the BJP as it is Mr. Reddy's company that bought bonds and donated money to the BJP exposing the money trail," Ms. Atishi said.

Presenting a chronology of what happened, the AAP said that Mr. Reddy went from being a star "approver" to a "star BJP donor" within 12 months by donating a total of ₹59.5 crore to the BJP. Nearly 92% (₹55 crore) of the money was donated after his arrest; the rest had been during the period when the liquor policy was in force.

"The ED that has been denying bail to accused in the case suddenly decided not to oppose the bail of Mr. Reddy who said that he was suffering from backache. Immediately after his release, Aurobindo Pharma of which Mr. Reddy is a director, and other associate companies bought electoral bonds to donate to the BJP," Ms. Atishi said.

"Electoral bonds have revealed that the trail of money from the Delhi excise policy does exist and does not lead back to the AAP but to the BJP, and therefore Mr. Nadda should be called for questioning by the ED and arrested in the same way Mr. Kejriwal was. The BJP, through ED, threatened Mr. Reddy to give pre-dictated statements against AAP leaders, which were read out in the Rouse Avenue court yesterday [Friday] to get the remand of CM Arvind Kejriwal, and on the other hand, it did a *vasooli* (recovery) of ₹59.5 crore from the same businessman through electoral bonds into its own accounts," she charged.

Also speaking at the press conference, senior AAP leader Saurabh Bharadwaj said this case will go down in history as how the BJP thought it would get away with its crime but the Supreme Court intervened and got electoral bond data to be published in the public domain.

"This is not an allegation, it is an open-and-shut case with the corruption money traced right to the bank accounts of BJP through recently released data on electoral bonds," he said.

Will work for the country from behind bars: Kejriwal

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, in his first message to the people since his arrest on March 21, promised to work for the betterment of the country whether he was inside the jail or out. Mr. Kejriwal's wife, Sunita, read out the AAP leader's message in a video posted on his X handle on Saturday.

Mr. Kejriwal said that there were numerous internal and external forces seeking to weaken the country and urged patriotic people to identify and defeat these forces.

"I have struggled a lot till today, and there are still many struggles written in my life ahead. So, this arrest does not surprise me," he said.

He asked the "mothers and sisters" in Delhi to trust his government to deliver the new scheme that offers ₹1,000 to eligible women above the age of 18. "I will come out soon and fulfil my promise," he said. He appealed to party workers to keep up their work.

Kejriwal moves High Court against arrest

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal on Saturday approached the Delhi High Court challenging his arrest by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in an excise policy-linked money laundering case.

Mr. Kejriwal's plea is unlikely to be heard before March 27 as the court is closed till March 26 for Holi. Sources in the Aam Aadmi Party had said Mr. Kejriwal's legal team would request the court to hear the matter urgently, preferably on Sunday.

A trial court in Delhi had on Friday remanded Mr. Kejriwal in the ED's custody till March 28 "for his detailed and sustained interrogation".

The six-day remand came on an ED plea seeking his 10-day custody.

Charge of 'misconduct'

A local court on Saturday directed authorities to preserve CCTV camera footage on a plea filed by Mr. Kejriwal, seeking the removal of a Delhi Police officer – Assistant Commissioner of Police A.K. Singh – deployed for security in the court for alleged misconduct.

The Chief Minister alleged that Mr. Singh was "unnecessarily harsh and mishandled the people around the courtroom" while bringing him to the court. He said that a written complaint had been filed against the officer when he had produced co-accused Manish Sisodia in court.

(With PTI inputs)

Delhi court extends ED custody of BRS leader Kavitha till March 26

Ishita Mishra
NEW DELHI

The Rouse Avenue Court granted the Enforcement Directorate three more days of custody of Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) MLC K. Kavitha, an accused in the money laundering case pertaining to the Delhi excise policy scam.

Ms. Kavitha was arrested from her Hyderabad residence on March 15. As per Special Judge Kaveri Baweja's ruling, she would remain in ED custody till Tuesday.

The ED, through its special counsel Zoheb Hossain, had sought to retain Ms. Kavitha in custody for five more days, alleging that she was not cooperating in the interrogation.

The Enforcement Directorate had alleged that Kavitha was not cooperating in the interrogation. FILE PHOTO

"She was confronted with statements..... The data in her mobile phone has been extracted and analysed. There is evidence to show that there was deletion of mobile data during ED investigation," Mr. Hossain submitted.

He also said that the ED had summoned Ms. Kavitha's nephew for interrogation in the case multiple times as he was allegedly involved in utilising the proceeds of the crime.

"Since he is not cooperating, we are conducting searches at several locations," Mr. Hossain added.

Advocate Nitesh Rana, appearing for Ms. Kavitha, informed the court that she had filed a bail application in the matter. The ED opposed the plea, claiming that it "cannot be entertained at the present stage".

In its previous remand application, based on which the court had granted the ED custody of Ms. Kavitha till March 23, the agency had alleged that she was "one of the conspirator and beneficiary" of the Delhi excise policy scam.

Ms. Kavitha, on March 19, withdrew from the Supreme Court her plea challenging the ED summons. On Friday, the top court issued notice on her plea challenging the arrest and asked Ms. Kavitha to move the trial court for bail.

AAP raises concern with CEC as Delhi Police block party office

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Alleging that the Delhi Police have blocked all routes to the Aam Aadmi Party's office in the national capital after the arrest of the party's national convener and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, the AAP wrote to Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Rajiv Kumar on Saturday seeking a meeting to present their urgent grievances.

Noting that the AAP's Matiala MLA Gulab Singh's premises were raided by the Income Tax department on Saturday, the party told the Election Commission (EC) that it continues to face "high handed" behaviour from Central law enforcement agencies despite the Model Code of Conduct being in place.

"We fail to understand how a political party can fight elections under such a repressive environment. We urge you to take corrective action immediately and direct all the agencies to observe restraint while the Model of Conduct is in effect," the AAP said in an email to the CEC.

The Delhi Police, which comes under the authority of the Union Home Ministry, barricaded approaches to the AAP office on Deen Dayal Upadhyay Marg in central Delhi around noon on Saturday.

The party said no one was allowed to enter the office despite requests for access.

"How can access to a national party's office be stopped during the Lok Sabha election? This is against the 'level playing field' promised in the Indian Constitution," said senior AAP leader and Delhi Minister Atishi, addressing a press conference at her residence. "We are seeking time with the Election Commission to complain against this."

Loyal to India, say separatist leaders' kin; BJP hails shift

The Hindu Bureau
JAMMU

The BJP on Saturday termed the public renouncement of separatism by the kin of two prominent separatist leaders in Kashmir "a significant shift towards peace and prosperity".

"The stance taken by [separatist Shabir Shah's daughter] Sama Shabir and [late Hurriyat chairman Syed Ali Geelani's granddaughter] Ruwa Shah is not just symbolic but also practical, as it reflects the aspirations of many young Kashmiris who seek a future free from conflict and instability," BJP leader Varinder Sharma said.

He said their rejection of separatism signified a "broader shift in societal attitudes" where the focus was shifting towards "constructive engagement and nation-building rather than divisive ideologies".

The duo, in separate public notices, distanced themselves from separatist outfits, saying they were "loyal to India".

Mumbai Police Crime Branch officials with Prasad Pujari at the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport, in Mumbai. ANI

CBI coordinates return of 2 Interpol Red Notice subjects

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) has coordinated the return of two Interpol Red Notice subjects from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and China.

Accused Peeru Muhammed Yahya Khan, wanted by the Kerala police for alleged rape and offences under the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes (Prevention of Atrocities) Act. He was tracked down to the UAE in coordination with the Interpol.

He was brought back by a Kerala police team, facilitated through the Ministry of External Affairs.

The CBI had received the Red Notice issued against Khan, at the request of the Kerala police, on August 10, 2024.

The second accused – Subash Vithal Pujari – was brought back by a Mumbai police team.

He was wanted in multiple cases involving attempted murder, extortion, criminal intimidation and possession of illegal weapons.

The CBI had got the Red Notice issued against him on February 14, 2012.

After attack on students in Gujarat, Indian diplomats meet Afghan counterparts

Kallol Bhattacherjee
NEW DELHI

The meeting comes just a day after Afghan officials met with students who were assaulted

Months after the Embassy of Afghanistan in Delhi was shut down due to an apparent lack of coordination and desertion of officials belonging to the pre-Taliban government in Kabul, a senior Indian diplomat on Saturday visited the mission and met with Afghan officials who have apparently been working there.

The information was shared by Zakia Wardak, consul general of Afghanistan in the consulate in Mumbai, on her social media handle at X. The post showed J.P. Singh, in charge of Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran (PAI) division in the Ministry of External Affairs, in the company of Ms. Wardak and others.

Significantly, the meeting came just a day after Ms. Wardak visited Gujarat University to meet with Afghan students who were assaulted by local miscreants who had objected to their offering Islamic prayers during the holy month of Ramzan.

"It was an absolute pleasure hosting Honorable J.P. Singh, joint secretary PAI Division, his deputy, Ms. Deepti Jharwal, and Professor Abdul Khaliq Rashi at our Embassy in New Delhi. Our meeting on Afghanistan and India fund was productive. Mr. Singh highlighted India's longstanding support for Afghanistan and expressed gladness at the Embassy's operations," she posted.

The Ministry of External Affairs was yet to answer *The Hindu*'s questions on the "India fund" that Ms. Wardak has mentioned.

The Afghan embassy in Delhi was shut down in November 2023 in the backdrop of bickering among the serving diplomats and allegations of corruption and financial mismanagement. Subsequently, Ms. Wardak and some of her colleagues took over the consular work in the missions in Delhi, Mumbai, and Hyderabad as India continued to maintain contact with the Taliban without upgrading the ties to formal diplomatic level.

It is understood that the presence of a female diplomat among the Afghan officials in India has found appreciation from the Indian side as the treatment of women by the Taliban in Afghanistan continues to be a matter of grave international concern.

Earlier, Mr. Singh visited Kabul on March 7 where he led a delegation to a meeting with the Taliban 'Foreign Minister' Amir Khan Muttaqi. During the meeting, Mr. Muttaqi expressed Taliban's gratitude for the humanitarian assistance India has extended since 2021. Mr. Singh had also thanked Kabul for fighting narcotics smuggling and the Islamic State - Khorasan Province (ISKP).

‘Pawar play’ queers the pitch for the ruling alliance in high-stakes LS seats

NEWS ANALYSIS

Shoumojit Banerjee
PUNE

Nationalist Congress Party (SP) chief Sharad Pawar is living up to his reputation as the ‘canny old man’ of Maharashtra politics, as he queers the pitch for his nephew, the rebel NCP leader Ajit Pawar, and his allies in the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) by exploiting schisms within the ruling Mahayuti coalition in key seats ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha election.

While Mr. Ajit Pawar – who is expected to field his wife Sunetra as the Mahayuti’s candidate for the high-stakes Baramati Lok Sabha contest – finds himself increasingly isolated within the Pawar clan, Mr. Sharad Pawar now has the BJP in a fix in the crucial Madha and Beed constituencies.

Recently, Mr. Ajit Pawar’s elder brother Srinivas Pawar, his sister-in-law Sharmila, and nephew Yugendra openly came out in support of Mr. Sharad Pawar, and have thrown themselves into campaigning for Supriya Sule, who is Mr. Sharad Pawar’s daughter and the incumbent MP in Baramati.

Stirring the pot

According to observers, Mr. Sharad Pawar’s diplomacy has also ensured that the three Opposition Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) parties – Uddhav Thackeray’s Shiv Sena (UBT), the Congress, and the NCP (SP) – work in smooth coordination. A case in point is that Ms. Sule’s rallies in Baramati are always well-attended by Sena (UBT) leaders like Sanjay Raut, and senior Congressman Balasaheb Thorat.

Well aware of the BJP’s discomfiture after absorbing Mr. Ajit Pawar’s NCP faction and its effect on the BJP’s relations with its smaller allies within the NDA, the 83-year-old NCP (SP) patriarch has attempted to detach parties like the Mahadev Jankar-led Rashtriya Samaj Paksha (RSP), and the Shiv Sangram, led by the late Vinayak Mete.

Pawar senior has offered Mr. Jankar, an influential Dhangar leader, the chance to contest the Madha Lok Sabha seat. The BJP has already announced that it will field Ranjitsinh Naik-Nimbalkar, the sitting MP from Madha, as its candidate for the seat, but its decision has caused serious resentment from its ally, the Ajit Pawar-led NCP faction.

BJP-affiliated sugar baron Vijaysinh Mohite-Patil, the patriarch of the Mohite-Patil clan which constitutes the political aristocracy of Madha, is upset at Mr. Naik-Nimbalkar’s candidacy. A stalwart ex-NCP leader, Mr. Mohite-Patil was once a close aide of Mr. Sharad Pawar and has previously served as Maharashtra’s Deputy CM. Recent attempts by Pawar senior to woo him back into his fold have set alarm bells ringing within the BJP.

In the undivided NCP, it was Ajit Pawar who had acted as Sharad Pawar’s ‘hatchet man’ during poll campaigns. FILE PHOTO

Complicating matters in the Madha Lok Sabha seat is yet another important local figure: Ramraje Naik-Nimbalkar, a member of an erstwhile Maratha royal family from Phaltan, who is aligned with Ajit Pawar’s NCP faction. Both Mr. Ramraje Naik-Nimbalkar and Mr. Mohite-Patil held a meeting at Solapur’s Akluj earlier this week where they vowed to undercut Mr. Ranjitsinh Naik-Nimbalkar’s chances in the upcoming election.

Meanwhile, even as the BJP has declared Pankaja Munde as its candidate for the Beed Lok Sabha seat, a touch of ‘Pawar play’ is turning a potentially ‘safe’ seat for the saffron party into a danger zone. Beed is the stronghold of the Munde clan, which is another backward class (OBC) community.

There is widespread speculation that Mr. Sharad Pawar could field Jyoti Mete from Beed; she is the widow of the late Shiv Sangram leader Vinayak Mete, an ardent Maratha quota supporter who died in a road accident in 2022. If she contests the seat, Beed could turn into a OBC versus Maratha conflict against the backdrop of Maratha quota activist Manoj Jarange-Patil’s agitation.

Of the approximately 21 lakh eligible voters in Beed, 7.5 lakh are Marathas while six lakh are from the OBC community, with Muslim and Ambedkarite communities accounting for around 5.5 lakh voters.

Defections on the rise

Earlier, Mr. Sharad Pawar gave a jolt to his nephew after Bajrang Sonawane, a leader of Mr. Ajit Pawar’s faction of the NCP switched to Pawar senior’s camp, boosting his chances. Mr. Sonawane had polled more than five lakh votes in the 2019 Lok Sabha election but was defeated by Pritam Munde, Ms. Munde’s sister and the sitting MP from Beed, who was dropped by the BJP this time.

“The numbers of incoming leaders from the other side will only increase in the coming days once the Mahayuti announces all their candidates,” quipped Mr. Sharad Pawar.

“By ensuring splits within Ajit Pawar’s NCP camp and resentment between local BJP and Ajit Pawar-led NCP leaders on key seats, Sharad Pawar is trying to hamstring the ruling Mahayuti in crucial, high-prestige Lok Sabha seats,” says senior political analyst Vivek Bhavsar.

Furthermore, in the undivided NCP, it was Mr. Ajit Pawar who had acted as his uncle’s ‘hatchet man’ during poll campaigns, often earning the ire not only of then-opponents like the BJP, but also incurring the wrath of leaders in the Congress as well, many of whom are now in the BJP.

Mr. Ajit Pawar is reaping the whirlwind in Baramati: while his bitter rival, ex-Congressman-turned-BJP leader Harshavardhan Patil remains ambiguous over campaigning for Ajit’s candidate, Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena leader Vijay Shivtare remains firm on entering the fray as the third candidate.

Formal greeting: PM Narendra Modi being welcomed by the BJP National President J.P. Nadda in New Delhi on Saturday. ANI

BJP leaders meet to finalise candidates for Lok Sabha polls

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The BJP’s central election committee (CEC) met in New Delhi on Saturday to finalise the party’s candidates in several States for the Lok Sabha election.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and BJP president J.P. Nadda were joined by other CEC members as they went over the list of probables to take a final call.

The States for which candidates were tipped to be discussed include Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan.

The CEC has met twice earlier and has named candidates for 291 Lok Sabha seats so far, including in Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Rajasthan, Haryana, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Uttarakhand, Kerala and Telangana among others.

The BJP is yet to announce candidates for many seats in some of these States.

At least three of the declared candidates, including Bhojpuri singer Pawan Singh, have withdrawn from the fray after their names drew some controversy or other.

The seven-phase polls are set to be held between April 19 and June 1 to elect MPs for 543 Lok Sabha seats.

Congress U.P. chief Ajay Rai to take on Modi in Varanasi

Party announces 45 names; fourth list with nominees from 12 States and one Union Territory reflects a mix of incumbent MPs and new entrants

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Saturday announced 45 names in its fourth list of candidates for the Lok Sabha polls while one seat for the Rashtriya Loktantrik Party (RLP) in Rajasthan.

Former Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijaya Singh will contest the Rajgarh seat in the State while Uttar Pradesh Congress chief Ajay Rai has been fielded from Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s seat in Varanasi.

Chhattisgarh Congress chief and sitting member from Bastar, Deepak Baij, has been dropped as the party named Kawasi Lakhma from the seat.

As reported by *The Hindu* earlier, sitting members from Tamil Nadu have been repeated, with Karti Chidambaram, Manickam Tagore, S. Jothimani, and Vijay Vasanth retaining their seats.

Among the changes, K. Gopinath has been fielded from the Krishnagiri seat, Sasikanth Senthil from Tiruvallur and M.K. Vishnu Prasad from Cuddalore.

In Uttar Pradesh, Danish Ali, who switched from the Bahujan Samaj Party recently, has been repeated from his present seat of Amroha while Choudhary Lal Singh, who merged his Dogra Swabhiman Sangathan Party, also got a ticket the Udhampur Lok-sabha constituency in Jammu and Kashmir.

Veteran figures: Ajay Rai and Digvijaya Singh.

In all, the Congress has named 183 candidates; One candidate from Gujarat dropped out and quit the party

Leaders’ sons fielded

Among the sons of senior leaders getting tickets, former Uttarakhand Chief Minister Harish Rawat’s son, Virender Rawat, has been fielded from Haridwar and P. L. Punia’s son, Tanuj Punia, has been given the Barabanki seat in Uttar Pradesh.

The fourth list had names from 12 States and one Union Territory, reflecting a mix of incumbent MPs being repeated, new entrants being accommodated and children of Congress leaders being given tickets.

There was also a clear effort by the Congress in Rajasthan to break its previous record in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls of failing to open its account.

After leaving the Sikar Lok Sabha seat to CPI(M), it has now left the Nagaur seat for Jat leader Hanuman Beniwal’s RLP.

So far, the Congress has named 183 candidates including the fourth list but one candidate from Gujarat dropped out and quit the party.

In Himachal Pradesh, six Congress MLAs join BJP

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

Amid political turbulence in Congress-ruled Himachal Pradesh, the six rebel Congress MLAs who were disqualified from the Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly last month joined the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) on Saturday. They were joined by the three Independent MLAs who had submitted their resignations to the State Assembly secretary on Friday.

The three independent MLAs who have now joined the BJP are Ashish Sharma, Hoshiyar Singh, and K.L. Thakur. The six former Congress MLAs are Rajinder Rana, Sudhir Sharma, Inder Dutt Lakhanpal, Ravi Thakur, Chaitanya Sharma, and Kutlehar MLA Davinder Bhutto. They joined the BJP in New Delhi, in the presence of Himachal Pradesh BJP president Rajiv Bindal and Union Minister Anurag Thakur.

Following the disqualifications, six Assembly constituencies had fallen vacant, and the Election Commission had announced a byelection for the Dharamshala, Sujanpur, Lahaul-Spiti, Barsar, Gagret, and Kutlehar seats. Now, after the resignations of the three Independents, it is expected that bypolls will also be held for the three constituencies of Hamirpur, Nalagarh, and Dehra.

INBRIEF

Two BJP candidates refuse to contest Lok Sabha polls

After protests from local cadres, two candidates of BJP in Gujarat, Ranjanben Bhatt, the sitting MP from Vadodara, and Bhikhaji Thakor, the party’s candidate for Sabarkantha, have announced that they are unwilling to contest the Lok Sabha elections from their respective constituencies. Their names were announced in the BJP’s first list. Ms. Bhatt was repeated by the party for the third time, while Mr. Thakor was picked as a fresh candidate in place of a sitting MP from Sabarkantha in North Gujarat. According to party sources, there were protests by the local partyworkers against their candidacy.

Left Front announces four more candidates in Bengal

The Communist Party of India (Marxist)-led Left Front on Saturday announced the candidates for four more Lok Sabha seats in West Bengal. The significant name on the list was Mohammed Salim, secretary of CPI(M) West Bengal unit, who will be contesting from the Murshidabad Lok Sabha seat. The other names include Alokesh Das for the Ranaghat Lok Sabha seat, Sukriti Ghosal for the Bardhaman-Durgapur seat and Shyamali Pradhan for the Bolpur constituency. All the four candidates represent the CPI(M). The Left Front had earlier announced the names of candidates for 16 seats.

Nitish shortlists candidates for 16 constituencies in Bihar

Amarnath Tewary
PATNA

With the first phase of the upcoming Lok Sabha election less than a month away, National Democratic Alliance (NDA) ally, the Janata Dal-United (JD-U), has shortlisted candidates for its 16 constituencies in Bihar based on seat-sharing within the alliance. Barring a few seats, party president and Chief Minister Nitish Kumar, it is said, has opted to repeat several candidates.

Sources in the JD(U) told *The Hindu* that Mr. Kumar has shortlisted Rajiv Ranjan Singh alias Lalan Singh (for Munger), Girdhari Yadav (Banka), Dileshwar Kamat (Supaul), Dinesh Chandra Yadav (Madhepura), Chandeshwar Chandravanshi (Jehanabad), Santosh Kushwaha (Purnia), Dulal Chand Goswami (Katihar), Alok Suman (Gopalganj), Kaushalendra Kumar (Nalanda), Ajay Mandal (Bhagalpur), Ramprit Mandal (Jhanjharpur), andSunil Mahto (Valmiki Nagar). They are all sitting JD(U) MPs. Sources said Lovely Anand has been nominated to the Sheohar seat. In the 2019 Lok Sabha election, the BJP’s Rama Devi won the Sheohar seat, but this time, the constituency is with the JD(U) under the NDA’s seat-sharing. Their son, Chetan Anand, is the RJD MLA from Sheohar. However, he was seen supporting the NDA government in the February 12 trust vote.

Nitish Kumar

Under the ruling NDA coalition, the BJP has 17 seats, the JD(U) has 16, the Lok Janshakti Party (Ram Vilas) has five, and the Hindustani Awam Morcha-Secular (HAM-S) and Rashtriya Lok Morcha have one seat each of the total of 40 parliamentary seats from the State.

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क्रमांक: 7237-42 दिनांक: 18.03.2024
निविदा संशोधन सूचना संख्या 25 वर्ष 2023-24
इस कार्यालय के पत्रांक 7123-34 दिनांक 11.03.2024 द्वारा जारी अल्पकालीन निविदा सूचना संख्या 36 वर्ष 2023-24 आमंत्रित की गई थी, जिसकी निविदा जमा करवाने एवं निविदा को खोलने की तिथि 21.03.2024 थी। उक्त निविदा में निम्नानुसार संशोधन किया जाता है-

विवरण	पूर्व में प्रकाशित दिनांक एवं समय	संशोधित दिनांक एवं समय
निविदा जमा की तारीख	12.03.2024 प्रातः 10.00 बजे से 21.03.2024 को दोपहर 12.00 बजे तक	12.03.2024 प्रातः 10.00 बजे से 10.06.2024 को दोपहर 12.00 बजे तक
निविदा खोलने की तारीख	21.03.2024 सायं 03.00 बजे	10.06.2024 सायं 03.00 बजे

NIB No. PWD2324A5065
UBN No.: 1. PWD2324WS0B22125, 2. PWD2324WS0B22128, 3. PWD2324WS0B22132
निविदा की शेष शर्तें यथावत रहेगी।
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INBRIEF

6 killed, 1 injured in chemical factory fire near Jaipur

Six people died and one person was injured in a fire that broke out at a chemical factory near Jaipur on Saturday, officials said. Jaipur District Collector Prakash Rajpurohit said the fire started late in the evening after an explosion in the boiler of the factory in the district's Bassi area. One of the two injured, who was admitted to Jaipur's Sawai Man Singh government hospital with 95 per cent burn injuries, died during treatment, hospital superintendent Dr. Achal Sharma said. The other injured person suffered 65 per cent burn injuries and is undergoing treatment. Jaipur Commissioner of Police Biju George Joseph said five people died on the spot. The fire has been doused. Rajasthan Chief Minister Bhajan Lal Sharma condoled the deaths and directed officials to provide assistance to the affected. PTI

ED seizes ₹40 lakh cash from Bengal Minister's residence

The Enforcement Directorate on Saturday seized over ₹40 lakh in cash from the residence of West Bengal Minister Chandranath Sinha in Birbhum district. The seizures were made after a 14-hour-long raid at the Minister's residence in which several property-related documents and a mobile phone were seized. The raids were held in connection with the West Bengal school recruitment scam in which former Education Minister Partha Chatterjee was arrested. The search started on Friday and continued till late on Saturday. The agency said Mr. Sinha could not clarify why the cash was kept at his residence.

Army cancels UCC seminar in J&K over poll code violation

The Army on Saturday cancelled a scheduled seminar on Uniform Civil Code (UCC) at the Kashmir University campus in Srinagar, hours after the National Conference sought the attention of the Election Commission and criticised the move as a violation ahead of the upcoming Lok Sabha election. The Army's seminar, titled 'Navigating Legal Frontiers: Understanding Indian Penal Code 2023 and the Quest for Uniform Civil Code' was scheduled for March 26 at the university. An invitation for the event was extended by Major General P.B.S. Lamba, General Officer Commanding headquarters 31 Sub Area.

Centre issues advisory on preventing hospital fires

As temperatures escalate, the Union Health Ministry and NDMA on Saturday issued a joint advisory to States on measures to prevent hospital fires during summer months. The Ministry has directed States/UTs to ensure that all accredited hospitals within their jurisdiction conduct thorough inspections, address discrepancy in electrical load capacity and obtain valid fire NOCs from respective State fire departments. States/UTs have also been urged to conduct follow-up reviews to ensure implementation of critical safety measures.

SUDOKU

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DIFFICULTY RATING: ★★☆☆☆

Solution to yesterday's Sudoku

8	4	6	2	7	3	9	1	5
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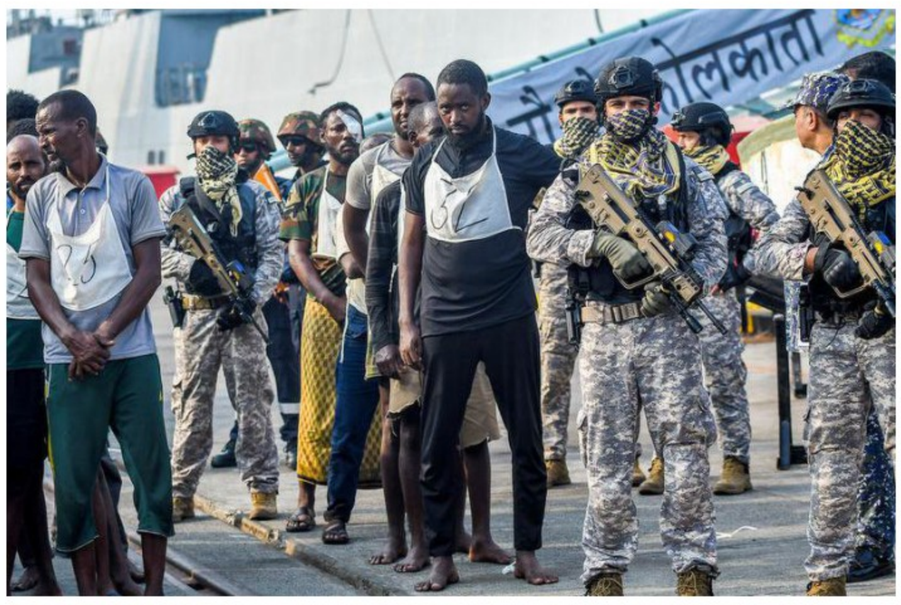
7	6	5	1	3	2	8	4	9
4	3	9	7	6	8	5	2	1
6	8	3	4	5	7	1	9	2
5	7	1	6	2	9	4	8	3
9	2	4	3	8	1	6	5	7

Navy steps up vigil amid piracy threat

35 pirates brought to land from the high seas have been handed over to the Mumbai police; crew of *MV Ruen* reinstated and the ship has hoisted the flag of Malta; 'Operation Sankalp' in the Gulf of Aden, which involved over 5,000 personnel, 21 ships, and 900 hours of flying, completes 100 days

Dinakar Peri
NEW DELHI



Brought to book: The 35 apprehended pirates were deboarded from *INS Kolkata* in Mumbai on Saturday and handed over to local police for further legal action as per Indian laws. EMMANUAL YOGINI

The 35 pirates who were apprehended from pirate vessel *Ruen* during a 40-hour operation last week were brought to Mumbai and handed over to the police for prosecution, the Indian Navy said on Saturday. It also announced that the Navy's maritime security operations under the aegis of 'Operation Sankalp' in the Gulf of Aden have completed 100 days.

"If there is disorder at sea caused by pirates, Houthis or whoever, trade gets disrupted. Then it has to come all around Africa through the Cape of Good Hope and the insurance rates will go up. Finally, who will pay that cost? You and me, the citizens, the common man. Therefore, our effort is to ensure that our trade continues safely and we get what we want at the price we are supposed to get and not at a higher price," Chief of Naval Staff Admiral R. Hari Kumar said addressing a press conference. "We are the largest resident naval power in the Indian Ocean. The ocean is named after India and I think it is *Bharti Nausena's* [Indian Navy] responsibility to ensure that Indian Ocean Region [IOR] remains safe, secure, and stable. We will ensure that it is free, open, inclusive and a rules-based order is maintained."

On the impact of the Red Sea crisis, Admiral Kumar said the High Risk Area (HRA) is already back in many ways and some notifications have already been issued by agencies from London. The insurance rates have gone up "by almost 35% to 40% and container costs have gone up from $500 to $2,000-plus", he said and almost 40% to 50% of the companies have started re-routing their ships around the Cape of Good Hope.

During the 100 days of 'Operation Sankalp', the Indian Navy has responded to 18 incidents and has played a pivotal role as the "First Responder" in the IOR, said Commodore Sundeep Randhawa, from Naval Operations, while briefing the media on the operation. "The arduous efforts of the Navy since December involved deployment of over 5,000 personnel at sea, over 450 ship days [with over 21 ships deployed] and 900 hours of flying by the maritime surveillance aircraft to address threats in the maritime domain," he said.

In a 40-hour operation, destroyer *INS Kolkata* intercepted merchant vessel-turned pirate vessel *Ruen* in the morning of March 15 and forced the surrender of 35 pirates and freed 17 crew members of the vessel. An Indian Air Force (IAF) C-17 transport aircraft airdropped marine commandos and combat boats as part of the mission, which was executed 2,600 km away from the Indian coast.

Ship sanitised

After the seizure of *Ruen*, Indian Navy specialists searched and sanitised the ship and in addition, an assessment of seaworthiness and essential repairs were undertaken by naval technical team for making the ship fit for further voyage, the Navy said. "On request from the ship's original company, Navibulgar, and the master, the crew of *MV Ruen* were reinstated on board the ship, which reverted to earlier status and hoisted the flag of Malta," the Navy spokesperson said.

MV Ruen has now proceeded to the next port of Salalah (Oman), as decided by the company, under escort of *INS Subhadra* to safeguard it against further pirate attack, the Navy added.

To questions on the origin of the drones and ballistic missiles being fired by the Houthi rebels targeting commercial shipping, the Navy Chief said it was not known if they were being assisted by another country. He said the drones could be assembled from commercially available materials. "One of the drones that we recovered from one of the merchant ships had the capability to travel 1,600 kilometres and it was made of plywood and other basic material. It had a four-stroke moped engine, very basic, elementary electronics, PCB [printer circuit board] on board. So it is not a very complicated thing and it's made probably even locally." He further stated that Houthis have also been firing missiles but their origin is not known.

Admiral Kumar also drew attention to the cost asymmetry between the attacker and the defender. "For example, you make a drone for ₹10-20 lakh and to defend it and shoot it down, the missile will cost ₹5-10 crore," he said.

IMA flags 'brain drain' of specialists to Britain's NHS

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

The Indian Medical Association (IMA) has expressed its displeasure over what it calls as the "cherry-picking" of physicians from India to fill the gaps in the National Health Service (NHS) of the United Kingdom, without offering anything substantial in return to the medical fraternity here.

The IMA called it brain drain and noted that India too needs its specialists and those in real need of employment and better career prospects are actually the MBBS graduates.

"The opening we want is for our MBBS graduates. The NHS has got gaps and we are ready to help them if they help us," IMA national president R.V. Asokan told *The Hindu*.

The IMA is actively looking at setting up a portal for providing employment opportunities to young doctors, he added.

Toll rises to 20 in hooch tragedy in Punjab; AAP govt. comes under fire

Vikas Vasudeva
CHANDIGARH

The police recovered a huge quantity of spurious liquor, and equipment used in its manufacture and labelling. PTI

With the death toll due to alleged consumption of spurious liquor in Punjab's Sangrur climbing to 20, the Election Commission (EC) on Saturday sought an immediate report from the Bhagwant Mann-led government into the tragedy, even as the State government faced severe criticism from Opposition parties.

The Chief Electoral Officer, Punjab has sought an immediate preliminary report and a detailed report from the State's Chief Secretary and Director-General of Police (DGP). An official statement said that, according to information from the Commission, around 20 persons had died and 20 people were receiving treatment in various hospitals in Sangrur and Patiala districts.

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) chief spokesperson Arshdeep Singh Kler demanded a criminal case be registered against Excise Minister Harpal Cheema in the matter. "Mr. Bhagwant Mann was on record as having said at the time of the 2020 Tarn Taran hooch tragedy that the then Excise Minister should resign immediately and that a murder case should be registered against the perpetrators," he said. "The Chief Minister has not found the time to visit the tragedy-hit families. It is condemnable that instead of comforting the victim's families of his home district, the Chief Minister is busy indulging in a drama in Delhi to please party supremo and Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal," Mr. Kler said.

The Punjab Police, meanwhile, has set up a four-member Special Investigation Team (SIT), headed by Gurinder Singh Dhillon, Additional Director General of Police.

Activists write to PM highlighting shortage of vital anti-TB drugs

Bindu Shajan Perappadan
NEW DELHI

In a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi ahead of World Tuberculosis Day, which is annually observed on March 24, activists, public health experts, TB survivors, and people living with HIV sought his urgent intervention to halt what they said were frequent shortages of anti-TB drugs.

The letter highlighted the shortage of drugs essential for treating drug-sensitive TB (DS-TB).

"As a country with the highest burden of tuberculosis in the world, we are deeply disturbed that India is experiencing stockouts of critically required drugs to treat people with TB," the group said.

"Till February 2024, [these] drugs – 4FDC-1st line DSTB-IP(Adult) Isoniazid, Refampicin, Pyrazinamide and Ethambutol, 3FDC-1st line DSTB-CP (Adult) Isoniazid, Refampicin, and Ethambutol – are facing shortages. This is as per the limited information received from the community/TB people in the affected areas and records only a fraction of the actual shortages and stockouts that have occurred," they added.

The National TB Elimination Programme (NTEP) acknowledges that an uninterrupted supply of quality assured anti-TB drugs is an essential component of its DOTS strategy, the group said, pointing out that an inadequate and poorly administered treatment regimen facilitates drug-resistant strains of the disease.

The most severe impact of these persistent stockouts of anti-TB drugs is on people currently undergoing treatment, leading to a situation of treatment interruption and a very high risk of developing resistance. This also affects treatment outcomes and puts an additional burden on the TB programme.

Pak. using terror as part of statecraft, says Jaishankar

Press Trust of India
SINGAPORE

In homage: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar pays tribute to a memorial of Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose in Singapore. PTI

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Saturday asserted that the mood in India now is not to overlook terrorism emanating from Pakistan which uses it as an "instrument of statecraft" and where terrorists are being sponsored at an "industry level".

Mr. Jaishankar, who is on a three-day visit to Singapore, made these remarks during a Q&A round held post his lecture session on his book *Why Bharat Matters* at the Institute of South Asian Studies (ISAS) of National University of Singapore (NUS).

"Every country wants a stable neighbourhood... if nothing else, you want at least a quiet neighbourhood," he said in response to a question on India's ties with Pakistan.

Underlining that Pakistan has been sponsoring terrorism against India, Mr. Jaishankar asked, "How do you deal with a neighbour who does not hide the fact that they use terrorism as an instrument of statecraft?" "It's not a one-off happening...but very sustained, almost at an industry level... So, what we have come to conclude is that we have to find a way of addressing [the menace], that dodging the problem gets us nowhere, it only invites more trouble," he said.

In India now, "the mood is not to overlook terrorists", Mr. Jaishankar said.

'Election time in Bengal now not that different from 70s'

Bishwanath Ghosh
KOLKATA

Amar Mitra

Eminent Bengali writer Amar Mitra, who recently had to revisit the 1970s due to a literary achievement, doesn't think the political atmosphere that West Bengal sees during elections has changed much when compared with those days.

According to him, while that period commonly witnessed rigging, it also boasted of some good leaders and great speakers, whereas today there is hardly any politician in Bengal whose speech one waits for.

"Present-day election atmosphere is not good. I am no longer eager to listen to election speeches, which I did once upon a time, when you had leaders like Hiren Mukherjee or Indira Gandhi or Indrajit Gupta. These days, leaders throw dirty language at each other, something completely unwanted. Most leaders do not even know their country and countrymen," said Mr. Mitra, 72, a recipient of several honours including the O. Henry Award and Sahitya Akademi Award.

Mr. Mitra received the 1919-founded O. Henry Award, whose past winners include William Faulkner, Saul Bellow, and Raymond Carver, exactly two years ago, but the more important news was that he was given the coveted award for a Bengali story published in 1977.

Mr. Mitra wrote *Gaonburo* (later titled *The Old Man of Kusumpur* in English) when he was 26, drawing from his experiences as an employee of West Bengal's Land Reforms Department. The story is about a man's journey to a remote village to meet a saintly figure who is supposed to have the answers to all of life's problems; as he makes the arduous journey, people he encounters along the way tell him their own problems, asking him to present their case to the old man.

WASHINGTON

President Biden signs long-awaited funding Bill, averting shutdown

GETTY IMAGES

U.S. President Joe Biden on Saturday signed a long-awaited funding Bill passed by Congress that would keep federal agencies running and avert a partial government shutdown. Senators had missed a midnight deadline to pass the $1.2 trillion package, but voted in the early hours to pass the resolution. AFP

WASHINGTON

U.S. military says it struck 3 Houthi underground storage sites in Yemen

AFP

The U.S. military said on Friday it had struck three underground storage facilities used by Yemen's Houthis, as the Iran-backed rebels continue to launch attacks on shipping in the Red Sea. The Houthi attacks have prompted many shipping firms to take the far longer passage around the southern tip of Africa instead. AFP

KANO

Nigerian Army rescues 17 students kidnapped in northwest Sokoto

AP

Nigeria's Army has rescued 17 students and a woman who were kidnapped in a dawn raid by armed men two weeks ago in northwest Sokoto, the State governor said on Saturday. Abductions by criminal gangs with no ideological affiliation and demanding ransoms have become a daily occurrence in Nigeria. REUTERS

SEOUL

North Korea, China commit to bolster ties in Beijing talks: KCNA

REUTERS

North Korean and Chinese officials met this week in Beijing and committed to further develop bilateral ties, North Korean media *KCNA* said on Saturday. In the meeting on Thursday, Wang Huning "said that no matter how the international situation may change, the China-DPRK friendship will never waver," *KCNA* said. REUTERS

Putin says Moscow gunmen tried to escape to Ukraine, Kyiv denies role

Russian President calls the attack in which at least 133 people were killed 'a bloody, barbaric terrorist act'; a 'window' had been prepared for the attackers on the Ukrainian border, he adds; Kyiv says Moscow is trying to create hysteria in society

Associated Press
MOSCOW

Russian authorities arrested the four people suspected of taking part in the attack on a suburban Moscow concert hall that killed at least 133 people and believe they were headed to Ukraine, President Vladimir Putin said Saturday during an address to the nation.

Kyiv, meanwhile, strongly denied any involvement in Friday's attack on the Crocus City Hall music venue in Krasnogorsk, which the Islamic State group's affiliate in Afghanistan claimed responsibility for in a statement posted on social media channels linked to the group. Kyiv accused Mr. Putin and other Russian politicians of falsely linking Ukraine to the assault in order to stoke fervour in Russia's war in Ukraine, which recently entered its third year.

Strict watch: Russian Rosguardia (National Guard) servicemen securing an area at the Crocus City Hall, in Moscow on Saturday. AP

Mr. Putin said authorities have detained a total of 11 people in the attack, which also injured scores of concertgoers and left the venue a smouldering ruin. He called it "a bloody, barbaric terrorist act" and said Russian authorities captured the four suspected gunmen as they were trying to escape to Ukraine through a "window" prepared for them on the Ukrainian side of the border.

Mr. Putin also said that additional security measures have been imposed throughout Russia, and he declared Sunday to be a day of mourning.

Investigators on Saturday were combing through the charred wreckage of the hall for more victims, and the authorities said the death toll could still rise. Hundreds of people stood in line in Moscow early Saturday to donate blood and plasma.

"We faced not just a thoroughly and cynically prepared terror attack, but a well-prepared and organised mass murder of peaceful innocent people," Mr. Putin said.

Some Russian lawmakers pointed the finger at Ukraine immediately after the attack. But Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, denied any involvement. "Ukraine has never resorted to the use of terrorist methods," he posted on X. "Everything in this war will be decided only on the battlefield."

Ukraine's Foreign Ministry accused Moscow of using the attack to try to stoke fervour for its war efforts. "We consider such accusations to be a planned provocation by the Kremlin to further fuel anti-Ukrainian hysteria in Russian society, create conditions for increased mobilisation of Russian citizens to participate in the criminal aggression against our country," the Ministry said in a statement.

In a statement posted by its Aamaq news agency, the IS's Afghanistan affiliate said it had attacked a large gathering of "Christians" in Krasnogorsk.

Chinese forces hit Filipino boat with water cannons

Associated Press
MANILA

Chinese coast guard ships hit a Philippine supply boat with water cannons on Saturday in the latest confrontation near a disputed shoal in the South China Sea, causing injuries to its Navy crew members and heavy damage to the wooden vessel, Philippine officials said.

The United States and Japan immediately expressed their support to the Philippines, as well as alarm over Chinese forces' aggression off the Second Thomas Shoal, which has been the scene of repeated confrontations between Chinese and Philippine vessels over the past year.

The far-flung shoal has been occupied by a small contingent of Philippine Navy and marines on a marooned warship since 1999, but has been surrounded by Chinese coast guard and suspected militia vessels in an increasingly tense territorial standoff. It's the second time the Philippine boat *Unaizah May 4* has been damaged by the Chinese coast guard's water cannon assault in March alone.

Aerial footage of a Chinese coast guard ship using water cannons on a Philippine resupply vessel, in South China Sea on Saturday. AP

Sparking fears

The repeated high-seas confrontations have sparked fears they could degenerate into a larger conflict that could bring China and the United States into a collision.

Washington lays no claims to the busy seaway, a key global trade route, but has deployed Navy ships and fighter jets in what it calls "freedom of navigation" operations, which China has criticised.

The U.S. has also warned repeatedly that it's obligated to defend the Philippines – its oldest treaty ally in Asia – if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under an armed attack, including in the South China Sea.

Israel denies Hamas report of shooting

Agence France-Presse
PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES

The Hamas-run government in Gaza said Israeli fire killed 19 people as they were waiting at an aid distribution point on Saturday, a charge Israel denied.

The deaths if confirmed would be the latest in a series of cases of Gazan civilians being killed while seeking desperately needed relief supplies.

The Hamas government media office said 19 people were killed and 23 wounded. The Health Ministry said "they were waiting for aid trucks" when they were hit by "Israeli occupation Army tank fire and shells". The Israeli Army denied it had fired on the crowd.

Earlier on Saturday, Israeli military had said that its forces forces fighting in Gaza have killed more than 170 gunmen during their days-long raid at the Palestinian enclave's main hospital.

Israeli troops entered Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza City on Monday morning and have been combing through the sprawling complex, which the military says is connected to a tunnel network used as a base for Hamas and other Palestinian fighters.

More than 350 Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants have so far been detained at the hospital.

Critical situation

Partial view of the municipal cemetery of Petropolis, where several niches were damaged when they collapsed due to the heavy rains in Petropolis, Brazil on Saturday. At least nine persons died in the midst of a strong storm that hit the southeast of Brazil. AFP

UN chief calls for Gaza ceasefire, visits border

Associated Press
AL ARISH

U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres stood near a long line of waiting trucks on Saturday and declared it was time to "truly flood Gaza with life-saving aid," calling the starvation inside the enclave a "moral outrage". He called for an immediate ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

Mr. Guterres spoke on the Egyptian side of the border not far from the southern Gaza city of Rafah, where Israel plans to launch a ground assault despite widespread warnings of a potential disaster. More than half of Gaza's population has taken refuge there.

António Guterres

"Any further onslaught will make things even worse – worse for Palestinian civilians, worse for hostages and worse for all people in the region," Mr. Guterres said.

An estimated 1.5 million Palestinians now shelter in Rafah.

Slovakia votes for President amid row over Ukraine war

Agence France-Presse
BRATISLAVA

Slovaks voted on Saturday in the first round of a tight presidential election pitting the Moscow-leaning ruling camp against a pro-Kyiv candidate amid deep divisions on the war in neighbouring Ukraine.

Parliament Speaker and former Prime Minister Peter Pellegrini and liberal ex-Foreign Minister Ivan Korcok, who is backed by the Opposition and is pro-Ukranian, are the clear frontrunners among nine contenders.

AI chatbots to help with your mental health, despite limited evidence they work

Associated Press
WASHINGTON

Download the mental health chatbot Earkick and you're greeted by a bandana-wearing panda who could easily fit into a kids' cartoon.

Start talking or typing about anxiety and the app generates the kind of comforting, sympathetic statements therapists are trained to deliver. The panda might then suggest a guided breathing exercise, ways to reframe negative thoughts or stress-management tips.

It's all part of a well-established approach used by therapists, but please don't call it therapy, says Earkick co-founder Karin Andrea Stephan.

Earkick's mental health chatbot on a smartphone. AP

"When people call us a form of therapy, that's OK, but we don't want to go out there and tout it," says Stephan, a former professional musician and self-described serial entrepreneur. The question of whether these artificial intelligence-based chatbots are delivering a mental health service or are simply a new form of self-help is critical to the emerging digital health industry – and its survival.

But there's limited data that they actually improve mental health. And none of the leading companies have gone through the FDA approval process to show they effectively treat conditions like depression.

The U.K.'s National Health Service has also begun offering a chatbot called Wysa to help with stress, anxiety and depression among adults and teens.

Ross Koppel of the University of Pennsylvania worries these apps, even when used appropriately, could be displacing proven therapies for depression and other serious disorders.

"There's a diversion effect of people who could be getting help either through counselling or medication who are instead diddling with a chatbot," said Koppel, who studies health information technology.

Hong Kong's new national security law comes into force

Agence France-Presse
HONG KONG

Hong Kong's new national security law came into force on Saturday, putting into immediate effect tough penalties of up to life imprisonment for crimes including treason and insurrection.

The law – commonly referred to as Article 23 – targets five categories of national security crimes and was swiftly passed by Hong Kong's Opposition-free legislature on Tuesday.

The United States, the European Union, Japan and Britain have been among the law's strongest critics, with U.K. Foreign Minister David Cameron saying it would "further damage the rights and freedoms" of those in the city.

John Lee

U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken on Friday expressed "deep concern" that the law could be used to undermine rights and curb dissent, adding it could damage Hong Kong's reputation as an international finance hub.

'Historic moment'

But Hong Kong leader John Lee has called the passage of the "Safeguarding National Security Ordinance" a "historic moment". He also also said the law was necessary to "prevent black-clad violence", a reference to Hong Kong's massive and violent pro-democracy protests in 2019.

Nearly 300 people have been arrested under the 2020 security law so far.

Dispersal out of Africa may have occurred during arid period

The Hindu Bureau

The most recent and widespread migration of humans out of Africa, which occurred less than 1,00,000 years ago, may have taken place during a particularly arid period following the Toba super-volcano eruption in Indonesia, a new study published in the journal *Nature* suggests.

It is typically thought that the dispersals of humans out of Africa occurred during humid periods that created 'green corridors' and facilitated the movement of people. Periods of aridity are thought to have constrained human movement and created food insecurity.

'Increased reliance'

Dr. John Kappelman from the University of Texas, Austin, and others studied a site in northwest Ethiopia, near the Shinfa River, that holds evidence of a human presence in the form of chipped stone from tool manufacturing and animal remains. Chemical analysis of glass shards in sediment samples revealed they were from the Toba supereruption, which places the presence of humans at this location around 74,000 years ago, in the Middle Stone Age (roughly 280,000 to 50,000 thousand years ago). Oxygen isotopes from ostrich eggshells and fossil mammal teeth indicate that the environment at this time was particularly arid.

The authors propose that this increased aridity – paradoxically – explains the increased reliance on fish at the site at this time and suggest that, as the river shrank in the dry season, fish were trapped in waterholes where they could easily be targeted by hunters, perhaps using bows and arrows. "Adaptive foraging along dry-season waterholes would have transformed seasonal rivers into 'blue highway' corridors, potentially facilitating an out-of-Africa dispersal and suggesting that the event was not restricted to times of humid climates," the authors write.

"The arid conditions might have triggered and necessitated movement, spurred along by the intrinsic attributes of seasonal rivers."

The authors suggest that the behavioural flexibility documented at the site, which helped these humans to survive the aftermath of the supereruption, was probably critical for modern humans to prosper in the diverse climates and habitats that they encountered during their eventual dispersal out of Africa and expansion across the world.

Anaemia prevalence in eight States found to be overestimated

The overall prevalence of iron deficiency was just 18.4%, it was highest among adolescent girls (31.5%) followed by adult women (27.7%), and elderly women (13.6%); even among anaemic women, only about a third was due to iron deficiency

R. Prasad

A study across eight States in India involving 4,613 participants that included adolescents (647 girls and 674 boys), adults (931 women and 927 men) and elderly (714 women and 720 men) has found that prevalence of anaemia has been overestimated by previous surveys. While the NFHS surveys measured haemoglobin using finger prick-based capillary blood, the latest multi-institutional study carried out by a team led by Dr. Anura Kurpad from St. John's Medical College, Bengaluru, used venous blood to measure haemoglobin and iron status through ferritin.

Capillary blood haemoglobin will be an underestimate of the true value as the red blood cell count in the capillary blood will be a little lower than venous blood due to a phenomenon called plasma-skimming. Also, tissue fluid gets mixed with capillary blood while drawing the blood sample leading to dilution and thus a reduction in haemoglobin value.

The study found that anaemia prevalence was predominantly of the mild variety. Overall, 18.4% of the entire sample were mildly anaemic, 14.7% were moderately and 1.8% were severely anaemic. As expected, the overall prevalence of anaemia was higher in women compared with men. The prevalence of moderate anaemia was significantly higher in women (22%) compared with men (7.6%) . Anaemia prevalence was 44%, 41% and 45% in adolescent girls, adults and elderly women, respectively. In the case of adolescent boys, adults, and elderly men, anaemia prevalence was 24%, 21% and 37%, respectively.

In comparison, the prevalence of anaemia was much higher as per the NFHS surveys that used capillary blood – 60.8% for women, 62.6% for adolescent girls, 26% for men and 31.8% for adolescent boys.

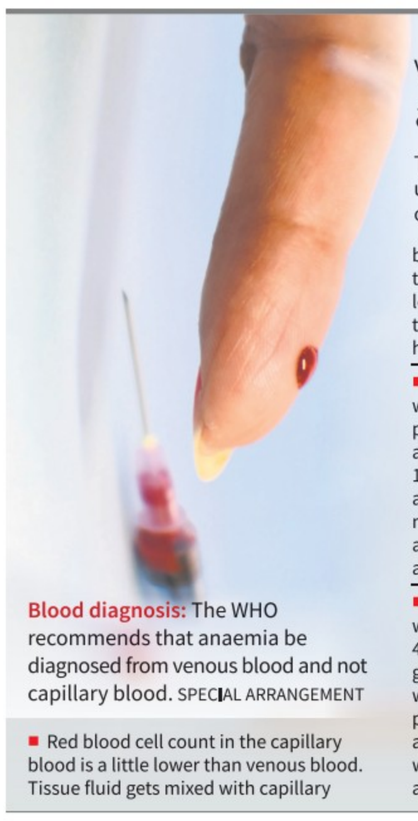
As per the present study, the prevalence of total anaemia was very high in the state of Assam (69.8% overall; 78.3% for women) followed by Odisha (55% overall; 63% for women). At 12.1% overall and 14.6% for women, Meghalaya had the least anaemia prevalence, followed by Telangana (16.9% overall; 24.6% for women), West Bengal (19.5% overall; 28% for women), Tamil Nadu (23.7% overall; 32.4% for women), Gujarat (33.9% overall; 44.2% for women), and Madhya Pradesh (45.4% overall; 55.9% for women).

Interestingly, the prevalence of iron deficiency for the whole group was just 18.4%. The prevalence of iron deficiency was 16.0%, 10.7% and 11.2% for adolescent boys, adults, and elderly men, respectively. Even among anaemic women (42.6% with all grades of anaemia), only about a third was due to iron deficiency. Among elderly women (40.9% with all grades of anaemia), only about a fifth had iron deficiency. Only in the case of adolescent girls did anaemia due to iron deficiency become relatively high at 45%. The major proportion of anaemia in all groups was associated with 'unknown causes'.

Even in the case of Assam where the prevalence of anaemia was highest (69.8% overall; 78.3% for women), iron deficiency was only 12.3% overall and 18.9% in women. In the case of Tamil Nadu where the prevalence of anaemia was 23.7% overall and 32.4% for women, iron deficiency was rather high at 22.8% overall and 38.2% in women. Interestingly, while Assam had the highest prevalence of anaemia (69.8% overall) and Meghalaya had the least anaemia prevalence at 12.1% overall, iron deficiency as a driver of anaemia was comparable and low in both States – Assam (12.3% overall) and Meghalaya (12.6% overall). "Only one-fourth of 42% of women with anaemia were due to iron deficiency. Yet, everybody assumes that iron deficiency is the main cause of anaemia in India," says Dr. Kurpad. "Though anaemia is caused by multiple factors including vitamin B12 and folate deficiency, and inflammation, the focus has primarily been only on iron deficiency."

Dr. Kurpad stresses that policies to provide iron supplementation for the entire population of India have to be reconsidered, particularly due to the dangers of excess iron intake. "It is not easy to excrete iron, and too much iron can cause oxidative stress on all organs," he cautions. "The focus should also be on reducing inflammation, which is best achieved naturally through increased consumption of fruits and diversity in diet to improve the intake of all nutrients," he says.

"Due to climate change, the protein, vitamin and mineral content in cereals is dropping," he says. "It's time we diversify from cereals to millets which are more resilient. Though phytates in millets can reduce absorption, millets contain higher amounts of iron and calcium leading to increased net intake."



Venous blood reveals true anaemia prevalence

The NFHS surveys measured haemoglobin using capillary blood leading to overestimation of anaemia

- Red blood cell count in the capillary blood is a little lower than venous blood. Tissue fluid gets mixed with capillary blood while drawing the blood sample leading to dilution, thus reducing the haemoglobin value
- Anaemia prevalence was found to be predominantly mild across eight States. 18.4% were mildly anaemic, 14.7% moderately anaemic, and 1.8% severely anaemic
- Anaemia prevalence was 44%, 41% and 45% in adolescent girls, adult and elderly women, respectively. As per the NFHS surveys, anaemia prevalence was 60.8% for women and 62.6% for adolescent girls
- The prevalence of anaemia among women was highest in Assam (78.3%) and lowest in Meghalaya (14.6%)
- Only about a fifth of anaemia in elderly women was due to iron deficiency, and 45% among adolescent girls
- The major proportion of anaemia is from unknown causes. But iron deficiency is wrongly assumed to be main driver of anaemia in India
- Providing iron supplementation for the entire population needs reconsideration, particularly as excess iron intake can be harmful

Blood diagnosis: The WHO recommends that anaemia be diagnosed from venous blood and not capillary blood. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

AI helps classify neem fruits based on azadirachtin content

The Hindu Bureau

Researchers at the School of Biotechnology, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi have developed an Artificial Intelligence-based tool to predict the level of metabolite content in neem fruits as either low or high based on images of neem leaves and fruits. The AI-based approach makes the use of expensive and cumbersome analytical equipment like high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) redundant. The classification of fruits can be carried out in the field even by untrained people. The results have been posted on a preprint server; preprints are not peer-reviewed.

The key metabolite of neem fruits is azadirachtin, which is used as a biopesticide. However, azadirachtin content in the seed kernel varies from one tree to another. Since the fruits with different concentrations of azadirachtin are mixed and bagged together in the field, the final azadirachtin content in each sack becomes low. Currently, there is no easy tool to evaluate the azadirachtin content level (high or low) in neem fruits inexpensively. Therefore, only a few fruits from each sack with varying azadirachtin content or from a single batch of multiple sacks are taken to determine the azadirachtin content using HPLC.

The team led by Dr. Binay Panda from JNU collected 1,045 neem leaves and fruits from trees across India and imaged them and also determined the content of five metabolites – azadirachtin, salannin, deacetylsalannin, nimbin, and nimbolide – from neem fruits using HPLC. Synthetic image augmentation while training using the deep learning frameworks ensured the sufficiency of images, which served the purpose during training. "We used images of leaves and fruits and with the corresponding HPLC-measured metabolite values within different deep learning-based frameworks to test for accuracy," says Dr. Panda. "Eighty percent of the data comprised of images and their corresponding metabolite values were first used for training, followed by 10% for model validation and the remaining 10% for model testing."

The AI-based approach makes analytical equipment like high-performance liquid chromatography redundant. GETTY IMAGES

The sensitivity

The sensitivity of the AI model to correctly determine and classify the fruits into low or high metabolite content was 83% and 82% for low and high azadirachtin classes, respectively when only the azadirachtin model was used. Using the same model, the specificity was 79% and 85% for low and high azadirachtin classes, respectively. "But when all five metabolites for the leaf and fruit images were considered, the sensitivity in predicting low and high classes was boosted by about 9% and 6%, respectively. Using the multi-analyte model, the specificity was boosted to 100% for both low and high classes," Dr. Panda says.

"Our model makes it possible to use fruit and leaf images alone to predict the azadirachtin content class in fruits without having to use HPLC."

Dr. Panda is not sure what parameters in the images of leaves and fruits were likely used by the model to determine the metabolite content in the fruits and classify them as either high or low classes. "There must be specific fruit and leaf features that are governed by metabolites, which change depending on the concentration of the metabolites," he says.

The researchers have built an Android App called Fruit-in-Sight using the best predictive model.

"All that the fruit pickers need to do is take a picture of the leaf and fruit of a neem tree, and the App will instantly tell them whether to pick or not pick the fruits from the tree based on its azadirachtin content class prediction," Dr. Panda says.

"This will help empower villagers to pick fruits from suitable trees with high azadirachtin content."

He adds that the App is a simple yet powerful enough to help boost the efficiency of the neem industry without any additional cost, time, or effort.

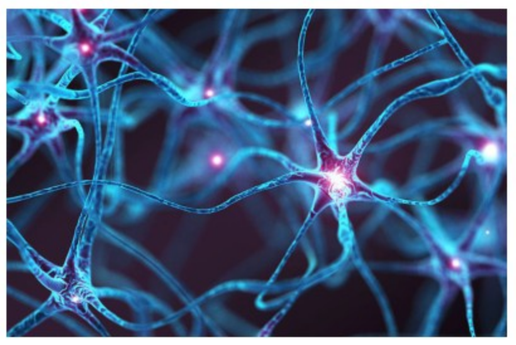
SNAPSHOTS

A gene for visual mating choices in butterflies found

A particular gene plays a critical role in visual preference for mate choice between closely related *Heliconius* butterflies. The findings provide insight into how visually guided behaviours can be encoded within the genome. Combining behavioural trials with genetic mapping, gene expression, and population genomic analyses, researchers found that *H. Melpomene* and *H. timareta* have evolved the same preference for red wing patterns. A single gene was more highly expressed in *H. cydno*.

A model suggests Europa's icy crust is at least 20 km thick

Scientists have estimated the icy crust of Jupiter's moon Europa to be at least 20 km thick by simulating the formation of its multi-ring impact structures. The researchers modelled various sizes of impacts on Europa, with different ice shell thicknesses and thermal gradients. From these simulations, they found that impacts caused graben-like features to form only when the ice shell was at least 20 km thick. The findings could inform future space missions that will investigate the habitability of Europa.



Gel for resealing the nervous system after neurosurgery

Scientists have engineered a tough, sticky biomaterial that can reseal areas of the nervous system opened during surgery involving the brain and spinal cord, minimising the risk of a dangerous surgical complication. Their material avoids the need for standard sutures used in the operating room and displayed promising performance during tests involving rodents, pigs, and human nervous system tissue. Current approaches reseal the membrane with sutures.

Question Corner

Bacteria's role

Does a specific bacteria subtype drive colorectal cancer progression?

Researchers have found that a specific subtype of a microbe commonly found in the mouth can travel to the gut and grow within colorectal cancer tumours. This microbe is also a culprit for driving cancer progression and leads to poorer patient outcomes after cancer treatment. The findings could help improve therapeutic approaches and early screening methods for colorectal cancer, which is the second most common cause of cancer deaths in adults in the U.S. Examining colorectal cancer tumours removed from 200 patients, researchers measured levels of *Fusobacterium nucleatum*, a bacterium known to infect tumours. In about 50% of the cases, they found that only a specific subtype of the bacterium was elevated in the tumour tissue compared to healthy tissue. Patients with colorectal tumours containing this bacterium have poor survival and poorer prognosis compared with patients without the microbe.

Readers may send their questions / answers to questioncorner@thehindu.co.in

FAQ

Who may vote from home in LS elections?

Is this the first time such a facility has been rolled out? Why are activists calling for the rules to be amended?

Saumya Kalia

The story so far:

The Election Commission has extended its 'vote-from-home' facility to persons with disabilities and senior citizens aged 85 and above for the Lok Sabha elections. This move will allow more than 85 lakh senior citizens and 88.4 lakh persons with disabilities to cast their votes through postal ballots.

Who is eligible?

Efforts to make participation inclusive thus far have been contained to the polling site, with a focus on setting up ramps, separate queues, wheelchairs and parking facilities. The postal ballot-home voting facility was amended to include senior citizens and people with disabilities; the benchmark disability should be not less than 40% of the specified disability as certified by the concerned authority. "Generally the tendency has been that the senior citizens want to participate in the process and walk to the booth. But this time, we have given them options to vote in their homes," Chief Election Commissioner Rajiv Kumar said. Those who opt for it this year are not eligible to vote directly at the polling station on polling day. The scheme is also "useful" as senior voters may not prefer to step out during the summer heat, an Andhra Pradesh official told *The Hindu* earlier. The Lok Sabha elections will be held between April 19 and June 1, when spells of heatwaves are likely to hit most parts of the country.

Has it been tried out before?

Vote from home was previously tried out during Assembly elections in select regions, allowing people with disabilities, senior citizens and people affected by COVID-19 to avail the facility. The ECI this year has, however, increased the upper age limit of elderly voters, from 80 to 85 years. The ECI also extended the postal ballot option to media personnel covering 'polling day activities' with authorisation letters from the Election Commission, and those part of essential services such as metros, railways and health care. The option is also open for service voters, such as personnel of the armed forces posted away from their hometowns, Central Armed Police Forces personnel deployed away from home, Central and State police personnel on election duty, and polling personnel and embassy staff on postings.

> 'Ideally, if people with disability have the option to vote from home, they should be allowed to submit this form online too,' says an activist

How may voters avail of the facility?

The key to the process is Form 12D, which is a letter informing the Assistant Returning Officer (ARO) that the person may not be in a position to go to the polling station to vote. The form can be downloaded online from the ECI website or collected from the office of the representative district officer of a parliamentary constituency. The form has to be filled and submitted within five days of notification of the polling date.

While it is a great initiative, Dr. Satendra Singh, a doctor and disability justice activist, says the policy may have to be tweaked for awareness gaps and procedural snarls. Electors are required to deposit the form to the Booth Level Officers (BLO) or the ARO, a "problematic" requirement for people with disabilities. "Ideally, if people with disability have the option to vote from home, they should be allowed to submit this form online too," he says. Once filed, two polling officials, accompanied by a videographer and a security person, will visit the elector's home and oversee the postal ballot voting process. The voter will receive an intimation about the date and approximate time of visit via SMS or through post. The home voting option will be attempted twice. The polling team will schedule a second visit if the elector fails to be at the given address during the first visit. During the visit, the polling team is expected to follow the protocol under the Conduct of Elections Rules, 1961. Each team of poll officers is required to (a) issue postal ballot to each of the Absentee Voters assigned to it, (b) brief the elector about the procedure to be followed for voting through postal ballot, (c) make sure that the elector votes without anyone influencing his/her choice, and ensure the secrecy of voting, according to a November 2022 communique for the vote-from-home facility. People with blindness or physical infirmity are allowed to nominate a companion and take their assistance while home voting.

What are the challenges?

Dr. Singh foresees some logistical hiccups, in coordinating requests, scheduling and moving paraphernalia around. Moreover, "do we have the machinery to fulfil this mammoth task?" he asks. The scheme will also need a "massive level of awareness generation," both among voters and polling officers, to attune the facilities to people's needs. The Election Commission has launched a Voter's Guide, outlining the provisions and procedural details available to persons with disabilities and senior citizens.

How bad is the humanitarian crisis in Gaza?

Why are several UN agencies warning about a severe food shortage and famine in the war-torn Palestinian enclave? What is the state of Gaza's economy? Why is more aid not being allowed? What is Israel's stand? What lies ahead?

Stanly Johny

The story so far:

As Israel's war on Gaza is reaching its sixth month, the Palestinian enclave has become the world's "largest open-air graveyard", as the EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell put it. The UN has warned that a famine in the tiny strip of land with 2.3 million people is "imminent". Despite growing international calls for a ceasefire, the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vows that it would continue its military operation until "Hamas is dismantled".

What is the situation in Gaza?

The war, which started after Hamas's October 7, 2023, attacks in Israel in which at least 1,200 people were killed, has already destroyed much of Gaza and pushed most of the enclave's population to the southern town of Rafah. According to Gaza's health authorities, the over five months of Israeli attacks has killed at least 32,000 Palestinians, a vast majority of them women and children. More than 74,000 people have been injured. Gaza lacks enough hospitals, medical professionals, medicines, clean water and other healthcare facilities to treat the wounded. "We see patients trying to recover from life-saving surgeries and losses of limbs, or sick with cancer or diabetes, mothers who have just given birth, or newborn babies, all suffering from hunger and the diseases that stalk it," the World Health Organization (WHO) said.

Most of the internally displaced people, roughly two million, are living in make-shift camps in the south. According to the UN, at the schools that shelter refugees, each toilet and shower are shared by hundreds of people.

> Israel's refusal to let more aid in could be tantamount to using starvation as a 'weapon of war'

Hunger crisis: Aid parcels are airdropped over the Gaza Strip on March 21. AFP

Diseases associated with poor sanitation such as hepatitis A, diarrhoea and other infections are rampant. As per the latest report from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC), the situation in Gaza is "catastrophic". Before the war, there was enough food in Gaza to feed its population and malnutrition was rare. Now, "over a million people are expected to face catastrophic hunger unless significantly more food is allowed to enter Gaza," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

Why is there a severe hunger crisis?

The IPC report states that Gaza is now experiencing the most severe hunger crisis anywhere in the world. If before October 7, 0.8% of children under five were acutely malnourished, that figure went up to 12.4% to 16.5% in February. Gaza needs an immediate increase in supplies of food, water and other essential supplies, it said. Children are dying from the combined effects of malnutrition and disease. And the situation has gradually worsened over the past five months. If the percentage of Gaza's population experiencing famine was roughly 30% in February, it went up to 50% by mid-March. In northern Gaza alone, at least 27 Palestinians, mostly children, have died due to malnutrition and dehydration, according to authorities. The north, where around 3,00,000 people are still living, has been mostly cut off from supplies as Israel has sealed off the border (except one checkpoint that was opened). Most of the aid that enters Gaza passes through two checkpoints in the south.

Experts usually look at three criteria to determine a famine – extreme lack of access to food, high levels of acute malnutrition and child deaths. Northern Gaza is already facing extreme lack of access to food and malnutrition levels and child deaths are steadily on the rise, which prompted the UN and several global powers to issue urgent calls for a ceasefire and more supplies for Gaza's population.

What led Gaza to the brink?

Before October 7, around 600 trucks entered Gaza daily, of which roughly 150 carried food. Since then, Gaza's economy has been destroyed by the war. According to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization, half of croplands in the north, the breadbasket of the Strip, had been damaged in the war. Israel's incessant bombing has also damaged Gaza city's port, which practically destroyed the fishing sector, a major source of income for Gazans. Government institutions are not working and construction and other activities came to a grinding halt. This pushed almost all of the population to be dependent on aid, which means the demand for supplies went up many times. But the average number of trucks entering Gaza has come down from 600 in October to 200 today, according to the UN, which accentuated the crisis that was already unfolding because of the destruction of Gaza's economy. In February-end, Israel forces opened fire at a crowd that had gathered near an aid convoy, triggering a stampede and killing over 100 Palestinians. To help alleviate the crisis, the U.S. and some European and Arab countries ramped up airdrops on Gaza. In one incident, a pallet crashed on to people waiting for food as its parachute failed to open, crushing at least five to death. As the crisis worsened with Israel's refusal to let more aid into the enclave, World Central Kitchen, a charity, sent supplies via the sea. The U.S. is planning to build a pier on the coast of Gaza to send aid, but it will take months for this plan to be operational. The UN said last week that Israel's refusal to let more aid in could be tantamount to using starvation as a "weapon of war". "The situation of hunger, starvation and famine is a result of Israel's extensive restrictions on the entry and distribution of humanitarian aid and commercial goods," said UN Human Rights chief Volker Turk.

Is there a solution in the offing?

Various UN agencies have made it clear that to quickly improve the situation, the war should be brought to an end. Gaza is going through its worst humanitarian tragedy. Its economy has been destroyed; population battered; aid supplies have fallen; and even the limited quantities of aid that reach the enclave are not being distributed properly because of hurdles that were created by ongoing fighting. The UN, which also lost over 100 employees, is understaffed and UN workers are also starving.

Israel allies in the West have acknowledged the seriousness of the situation. Antony Blinken, the U.S. Secretary of State, said last week that all of Gaza's population "are experiencing severe levels of acute food insecurity". But their solution to the crisis is to find alternative ways to ramp up supplies without forcing Israel to open the border, which is unlikely to alleviate the crisis. What Gaza needs is an immediate ceasefire. But after over five months of fighting, Israel has barely achieved its declared objectives such as freeing hostages or dismantling Hamas. Negotiations are ongoing under the mediation of Qatar, Egypt and the U.S., but Israel and Hamas have not reached an agreement. Israel appears to be ready for a short-term pause in fighting in return for the release of hostages, but Hamas seeks a lasting ceasefire and has also demanded the release of some high-profile Palestinian prisoners, including Marwan Barghouti, the Fatah leader who has been in Israeli jails for over two decades. As both sides reach no common ground, Israel, which continues to get weapons from the U.S., continues the war, for now.

Why is DGCA firm on new rest rules for pilots?

What are the changes to pilots' rest norms introduced by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation? Why were they brought about? When is the deadline for implementation? Why are the airlines unhappy? What are the pilots saying?

Jagriti Chandra

The story so far:

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has rejected a request by airlines to postpone new pilot duty norms, reiterating that the revised schedule will have to be implemented from June 1. The DGCA had notified the revised rules governing duty hours and rest periods for pilots in January.

What are the new rules?

The new rules provide enhanced weekly rest for pilots which has gone up from 36 hours to 48 hours. The rules have also reduced night-time flying, which is known to contribute to fatigue and impact alertness levels as sleep is displaced from the optimum part of the circadian rhythm.

Earlier, a pilot could carry out six landings during night-time flying, which has now been reduced to two. The night-time shift has been extended by an hour to 6 a.m, from the earlier midnight to 5 a.m. The maximum flight duty period for flights encroaching night-time has also been reduced from 10 hours to eight hours. While pilots have broadly welcomed the changes, their demand for a ban on two consecutive night duties went unheeded. Pilots say that flying a second night without a reset of the circadian rhythm is extremely stressful. Consecutive night duties result in accumulation of sleep debt and an increase in fatigue related impairment. According to IATA's Fatigue Management Guide for airlines, recovery of waking alertness and performance after accumulating a sleep debt may take longer than two nights of unrestricted sleep.

> Pilots say flying has increased for them in the past five years, and that a growing route network beyond metros has resulted in tougher conditions

REUTERS

Pilots also pointed out that airlines are only required to publish the crew roster "sufficiently in advance" and the time frame has not been defined unambiguously. The draft rules placed for stakeholder comments had proposed that rosters be finalised seven days in advance.

The DGCA also wants airlines to submit an analysis of fatigue reports submitted by pilots on a quarterly basis along with an action taken report. It has also said that it plans to adopt a new regime of fatigue management, known as the Fatigue Risk Management System, which is a data-driven approach to enhance monitoring and reporting of flight crew fatigue though pilots are apprehensive that this could reduce existing rest periods prescribed in the rules.

Why are the airlines opposed to it?

The Federation of Indian Airlines, FIA, comprising Air India, IndiGo and SpiceJet, wrote to the DGCA in February seeking postponement of the June 1 implementation deadline as it could have "immediate and significant impact to business and customers alike" as airlines would be required to hire "15% to 25% more pilots" when it takes approximately 8-10 months to release a newly inducted pilot for flying. The FIA warned that the June 1 deadline could result in the cancellation of 15%-20% of flights by most airlines as well as cancellation of some long-haul international flights. In response, the DGCA reiterated that it will stick to the June 1 deadline.

A senior DGCA official told *The Hindu* that by speaking about flight cancellations during the peak summer travel season, airlines were indulging in "scaremongering". He said that a six-month time frame for implementation was provided keeping in mind that a commercial pilot licence holder, who has completed his training on a specific type of aircraft such as an A320 or Boeing 737 MAX, did not need more than four months to be cleared for flying.

Is fatigue mounting?

In a first, the DGCA has acknowledged that unfortunate instances of pilot deaths in the recent past were "ostensibly" due to punishing schedules and cumulative impact on health and well-being of pilots, which it said was an "urgent wake up call" for the industry. There were at least three such deaths while on duty, including the death of IndiGo pilot, Manoj Balasubramani, who fell unconscious at the boarding gate after reporting for duty to operate a flight from Nagpur to Pune on August 17, 2023. He was rushed to hospital, where he passed away.

Pilots say that not only has flying increased for them in the past five years, a growing route network beyond metros has resulted in tougher combination of flights, which involve more landings and are therefore strenuous. For example, the return leg of an international flight is often combined with an additional domestic flight. There are also more red eye flights to short-haul destinations such as in the Gulf and Singapore. Add to this an uncertainty of roster, where a pilot can be called in for a flight for 4 a.m. with just a 12-hour notice. "Denying a duty in such circumstances can lead to disciplinary proceedings," said a senior pilot of a full-service carrier. Pilots recall Jet Airways days where a printed roster was sacrosanct. There are also rostering malpractices, where pilots are compelled to work beyond their maximum duty hours or provided less rest periods than what is laid down. On March 22, the DGCA imposed a fine of ₹80 lakh on Air India after it discovered lapses during a spot check in January.

How many pilots are registered with DGCA?

Many airlines like Air India and Vistara are already grappling with pilot shortages compared to aircraft strength. As on December 2023, there were a total of 771 aircraft with various Indian airlines and 9,524 commercial pilots registered with the DGCA. Additionally, there were 67 foreign pilots too due to a shortage of commanders on certain aircraft type such as the Boeing 777. India's commercial airlines are likely to nearly double fleet size to 1,400 by fiscal year 2029-30, shows CAPA data. This will mean airlines will have to add 10,900 additional pilots by 2030, which is nearly 1,600 new pilots a year. Last year, the regulator issued 1,272 commercial pilot licences.

The prophet of probity

Arvind Kejriwal

The Delhi Chief Minister, who rose to power riding anti-corruption sentiments in the country, faces the biggest challenge of his career after he was arrested by the ED in a money laundering case

Sobhana K. Nair

ILLUSTRATION: SOUMYADIP SINHA

For the majority of the tenure of independent India, the phrase "common man" evoked only one image for most Indians – a bespectacled dhoti-and-plaid-coat-clad old man with a startled expression conveying shock at the state of the new republic. The image emerged from cartoonist R.K. Lakshman's pencil.

In the past decade or so, the common man has found a new icon in the form of Arvind Kejriwal, the raison d'etre of Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) or the Common Man's Party.

The two – the image and the man – have several similarities. At a superficial level they look alike. Mr. Kejriwal, with his short stature, dressed in loose shirts and ill-fitting trousers, carrying around a battle-weary expression, is the average Indian man. And much like Lakshman's common man, he established himself in the nation's conscience as an anti-corruption crusader. The similarities end here, however. Lakshman's image was that of a mute spectator, almost a fence-sitter who ruminates over the ills of the nation. In sharp contrast, Mr. Kejriwal emerged as an insurrectionist, who wanted to bring down the existing political system to build it anew.

The irony wasn't lost on any one. Mr. Kejriwal, who painted the political class in broad strokes with his enunciation in 2011 & 2012 – '*Sab mile hue hai*' (Everyone is in cahoots) and '*Sab Chor Hai*' (Everyone is a thief) – finds himself under investigations by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) in a money laundering case. On Friday evening, he was sent to the ED's remand till March 28 by the Rouse Avenue Court.

Mr. Kejriwal, born in 1968 to a middle class family in Hisar district of Haryana, holds a degree of electrical engineering from IIT-Khargpur. He went on to work for Tata Steel in Jamshedpur. But instead of pursuing the corporate ladder, he quit to prepare for the Civil Services Examination. A 2011 profile of Mr. Kejriwal in *The Caravan* magazine, quotes his father as saying Mr. Kejriwal always wanted to join the IPS. But he didn't make the cut and had to settle for Indian Revenue Services.

Magsaysay Award winner

At the training course in Mussoorie, he met his future wife, Sunita, and after graduating, they both joined the Income-Tax Department in Delhi as assistant commissioners. He quit the service midway, disillusioned by all pervasive corruption around him, and became a full-time activist. In 2006, he won the Ramon Magsaysay Award for his painstaking work of exposing the leaks in the delivery of the basic government services such as the Public Distribution System.

Mr. Kejriwal, 55, hardly stuck to any one route for too long. Winning small battles working at a micro level was only the first piece of the larger puzzle he wanted to solve. In November 2010, he was one of the 10 persons who met in the basement of a church in Delhi's Gole Market to begin the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement.

Anna Hazare, a Pune-based Gandhian, was roped in as its mascot. The central piece of the IAC's campaign was a demand for an all-powerful Lokpal with the right to haul up bureaucrats and any elected representative for any act of corruption. The movement worked on the basic cynical premise that the ruling class is corrupt unless and otherwise proved.

The then-Manmohan Singh government that was besieged by various corruption charges, courted Mr. Kejriwal and his band. First, the government's advisory body, the National Advisory Council, drafted a Lokpal Bill, which the IAC rejected as ineffectual. They gave Mr. Kejriwal a place in a committee instituted to draft the Jan Lokpal Bill, but he quit, saying his voice was not heard.

As per many strategists in the Congress, this was a misstep. The campaign against the government only intensified reaching a crescendo with mass protests in Delhi with Mr. Hazare at the centre of it and Mr. Kejriwal being his lieutenant. Between the 2011 protests and the formation of the AAP on November 26, 2012, Mr. Hazare and many other erstwhile faces of the movement were left in the wayside.

Apart from the AAP, there are only two other examples – N.T. Rama Rao's Telugu Desham Party and Prafulla Kumar Mahanta's Asom Gana Parishad in independent India – that rose to power at their very first attempt. Both were founded in parochial sentiments. But the AAP didn't have any ideological moorings other than confrontation. Those who have closely worked with Mr. Kejriwal claim that he abhors the word "ideology", which he believes only propagates dogmatism. After his arrest, however, Delhi Minister Gopal Rai said, "Arvind Kejriwal is not a person, he is an ideology."

Rightward shift

He is not an adherent to leftist or right-wing politics in the strictest of definition. Though, critics point out that the India Against Corruption movement was ably supported by the right wing, which found an opening in breaking the Congress's stranglehold over power in Delhi. If Mr. Kejriwal and the AAP's economic outlook is towards a welfare state, he has been speaking the same lexicon as the BJP in the last few years. "The 20% secular space is already overcrowded; there is no point vying for it. And why should we concede the remaining 80% space, he asked us," a former associate of the Delhi Chief Minister said.

In 2019, the AAP voted in favour of the abrogation of Article 370 and the Bill stripping Jammu & Kashmir of statehood. Four years later, it would fight against the Delhi Services Bill that handed over the control of Delhi bureaucracy to the Lt. Governor.

Mr. Kejriwal is a man who has seen more successes than failures. The AAP's foray in Punjab resulted in a spectacular victory in 2022. In 11 years since its formation, it was accorded national party status in September 2023 by the Election Commission on the back of the votes it polled in Delhi, Goa, Punjab and Gujarat. It currently is part of the INDIA bloc, along with the Congress, against whom Mr. Kejriwal ran a sustained and relentless campaign. On his arrest, the Congress too joined the other Opposition parties to speak up in Mr. Kejriwal's support.

His arrest on Thursday is the biggest ever challenge thrown at the AAP as well as its leader. As he was led away by ED officers after his remand hearing at the Rouse Avenue Court, just few metres away from the AAP's headquarters, he remained defiant. "My life is dedicated to the country, whether I am inside (jail) or outside," he said. The question the political observers are asking is whether his party that revolves entirely on his persona would survive this attack in his absence or not.

THE GIST

- Arvind Kejriwal was one of the 10 persons who met in the basement of a church in Delhi's Gole Market to begin the India Against Corruption (IAC) movement that ran an anti-corruption campaign against the then-Congress government
- On November 26, 2012, Kejriwal, drawing momentum from the movement, formed the Aam Aadmi Party and fight against corruption became its key slogan
- He is not an adherent to leftist or right-wing politics in the strictest of definition, though critics point out that the IAC movement was ably supported by the right wing

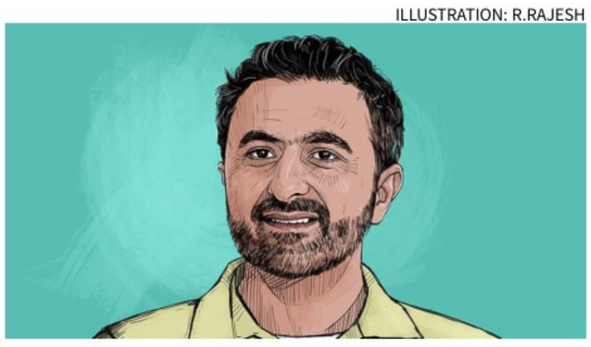
Microsoft's new bet

Mustafa Suleyman

The co-founder of Inflection AI, a company building generative artificial intelligence, will now lead the software giant's AI operations

Vasudevan Mukunth

ILLUSTRATION: R.RAJESH



In Microsoft's latest hedge against OpenAI, and after its deal with Mistral, the tech giant hired away two founders and a bunch of employees of Inflection AI, a company building generative artificial intelligence (AI) models. The co-founders, Mustafa Suleyman and Karén Simonyan, will now work at Microsoft AI, the company's new 'consumer AI' unit, with Mr. Suleyman as CEO and the latter as chief scientist. The move has surprised many industry players for what it implies about events inside Inflection AI before the hire-away and what it portends about Microsoft's plan with its new AI division.

Mr. Suleyman grew up in Inner London as the son of a Syrian taxi driver and an English nurse. He met Demis Hassabis when studying at a boys' school; they would later co-found AI research company DeepMind. Mr. Suleyman finally attended Oxford's Mansfield College but dropped out when he was 19, following up with stints with the Muslim Youth Helpline (which he co-founded with Mohammed Mamdani), as a policy officer with then London Mayor Ken Livingstone, and with a company he started called Reos Partners.

His big break came with DeepMind, in 2010, which Google acquired four years later for £400 million. Mr. Suleyman moved from being its Chief Product Officer to the head of a new department at DeepMind tasked with finding and implementing real-world applications of its products, which ranged from cooling Google's heat-spewing data centres to designing healthcare solutions with the U.K. National Health Service.

In 2017, DeepMind made waves by releasing AlphaGo Zero and AlphaZero, powerful AI systems designed to play chess, go, and shogi at levels rivalling the best human champions. A year later, the company's AlphaFold program wowed scientists with partial success at predicting the structures of complex proteins, considered an important yet very difficult task in biology.

Under a dark cloud

But in 2019, Mr. Suleyman's reputation came under a dark cloud after DeepMind employees alleged he was a bully and that he had created a toxic work environment. They later received an email acknowledging Mr. Suleyman's leadership at the company "fell short"; Mr. Suleyman himself left in December 2019 to join Google in a vice-presidential role. *Insider* reported two years later that Mr. Suleyman was known to humiliate his colleagues in front of others and once said, "I crush people".

In March 2022, Mr. Suleyman co-founded Inflection AI along with venture capitalist Reid Hoffman and scientist Karén Simonyan with the stated mission of improving human-AI interactions. Between this moment and Mr. Suleyman's departure to Microsoft last week, Inflection was able to raise $225 million in May 2022 and $1.3 billion in June 2023, including from Microsoft and Nvidia. Inflection announced then that it planned to use most of the latter for a next-generation AI model for its in-house chat AI application 'Pi'. Mr. Suleyman told *Reuters* it would have "approximately three times more [computing power] than what was used to train all of GPT-4," the model that powers ChatGPT.

This comment speaks to the question of what could have happened at Inflection AI that resulted in Mr. Suleyman leaving to lead Microsoft AI. Specifically, he leaves less than a year after the company he co-founded raised a substantial sum of money and support from industry leaders and announced big plans for its future. Some have asked questions about Inflection's Pi, in particular the feasibility of competing in a market already crowded with several chat AI apps.

Mr. Suleyman isn't technically skilled and brings managerial chops to AI outfits like Sam Altman has at OpenAI, yet some have also asked whether a company as large as Microsoft needs more managers. Questions also swirl about how his presence at the helm of a large AI vertical – in charge of Copilot and Bing, among others – may affect the working culture at Microsoft, even if Satya Nadella has expressed admiration of his work.

The future, for now, lies hidden behind the questions from Mustafa Suleyman's past.

Stalin's man

K. Ponmudy

The DMK leader's re-induction into the Tamil Nadu Cabinet after the SC stayed his conviction in a disproportionate assets case saw tensions rise between the government and the Governor

B. Kolappan

ILLUSTRATION: R.RAJESH

When Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi staged a walkout to protest the resolution that sought to retain the portion of his customary address that he skipped, Higher Education Minister K. Ponmudy alone could be seen making a gesture, "get lost". It was January 2023. Mr. Ponmudy was not in the Assembly when the Governor refused to read his customary address in 2024. He had already been divested of his portfolios after the Madras High Court sentenced him and his wife for three years in jail in a disproportionate assets case.

It looked as if the ongoing tussle between the Tamil Nadu government and the Governor became a personal battle between Mr. Ponmudy and Mr. Ravi. The Governor refused to swear him in even after the Supreme Court stayed the conviction. The Governor reluctantly did it on March 22, only after the Chief Justice of India, D.Y. Chandrachud, came down on him for "defying the Supreme Court of India".

The author of *The Dravidian movement and the black movement,* an outcome of his doctoral thesis, Mr. Ponmudy, a hardcore follower of Periyar, the founder of the Dravidian Movement, was a student of the Annamalai University, a citadel of the Communist and Dravidian Movement. Mr. Ponmudy was the secretary of the Dravida Manavar Kazhagam in the university.

Rise to prominence

As a college teacher, he worked in Villupuram and Kumbakonam colleges and functioned as the state vice-president of the Pakutharivalar Kazhagam (Rationalist Kazhagam) since government employees could not become members of a political party. 'When a speaker who was supposed to participate in a meeting organised on the occasion of the birthday of Kalaignar [M. Karunanidhi], did not turn up, Ponmudy filled the slot and enthralled the audience," recalled a close associate. The event drew the attention of the party high-command, particularly Karunanidhi.

Mr. Ponmudy, now a sitting member of Thirukovilur, always wanted to start his career as a legislator from the constituency since his native village T. Edayar was part of it. He started contesting from the 1980s, but took his first victory in the 1989 Assembly elections held after the demise of AIADMK founder M.G. Ramachandran.

The DMK won the elections, as there were multi-cornered contests and the AIADMK went to the polls under the leadership of Janaki, the widow of MGR, and Jayalalithaa. Mr. Karunanidhi, who allocated berths for Duraimurgan and Veerpandi Arumugam, members of the Vanniyar Community, wanted to offer a berth for a non-Vanniyar, and Mr. Ponmudy filled the slot. His elevation as a Minister also witnessed his rise in the party. He always found a berth in the subsequent DMK governments led by M. Karunanidhi and Mr. Stalin.

He was arrested when Jayalalithaa was the Chief Minister after he entered Tamil Nadu Civil Supplies Corporation godowns in 2001 to prove that the quality of rice meant for public distribution was of poor quality.

The rise of strong second-line leaders such as Mr. Duraimurugan, Mr. Ponmudy, Veerapandi Arumugam and K.N. Nehru had forced Mr. Stalin to take a decision against offering positions for their sons in the youth-wing of the party. Mr. Stalin also bifurcated and trifurcated the party's district units to clip the wings of the second-line leaders. But eventually he had to reverse his stand and award seats to the wards of these leaders.

Mr. Ponmudy is known for his outbursts and impatience with party workers, But his close associates say it is actually a facade. "He will always ensure that the requests of party workers are fulfilled even though he would have behaved rudely when they had approached him. How do you explain his victories in elections?" asked a close associate. Despite his clout, he was not able to get the Kallakurichi Lok Sabha seat for his son Gowtham Sigamani, its sitting member.

His re-induction may infuse the energy he required to perform. But everything depends on the outcome of the Lok Sabha polls. The DMK, even if it makes a mark in Tamil Nadu, will be at the mercy of the BJP if it emerges victorious at the national level.

INBRIEF

Govt. extends ban on onion exports till further orders

The Centre has extended the export ban on onion till further orders to increase domestic availability and keep its prices under check. Earlier, the export was prohibited till March 31 this year. "Export prohibition on export of onions valid till 31st March 2024, is extended until further orders," the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) said in a notification dated March 22. On December 8, 2023, the government had banned the export of onions. PTI

Maruti Suzuki invests ₹2 crore in AI, ML start-up Amlgo Labs

Maruti Suzuki India Ltd. on Saturday announced that it had invested more than ₹1.99 crore in Amlgo Labs Private Ltd., a technology-led start-up, for an equity stake of 6.44%. The start-up operates in the area of data analytics, cloud engineering, Machine Learning (ML) and Artificial Intelligence (AI), to assist companies in data-driven decision making. The investment is being made through the Maruti Suzuki Innovation Fund, the company said.

JCB India achieves production milestone of 5 lakh machines

Earthmoving and construction equipment manufacturer JCB India said it had achieved a production milestone of 5,00,000th unit in India. Group Chairman Lord Bamford visited the company's India headquarters in Haryana on the occasion. "India now plays an important part in our global business, as it is one of our largest markets, and also contributes to the global supply chain for JCB." The 5,00,000th machine was a telehandler used in material handling.

Govt. lets Adnoc export oil from Indian strategic storage

Centre takes the decision to allow for operational flexibility to the foreign firm; crude oil is currently not allowed to be exported except through the state-owned Indian Oil Corporation

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

The government has allowed Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (Adnoc) to export crude oil it has stored in underground strategic storages at Mangalore to give operational flexibility to the foreign firm, an order of the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said on Saturday.

At present, crude oil, which is the raw material for producing fuels like petrol and diesel, is not allowed to be exported except through the state-owned Indian Oil Corporation (IOC).

In an order, the ministry said the condition of export being allowed only through IOC will continue, but "Adnoc is exempted from STE conditions and is allowed to re-export crude oil from their commercial stockpile at Mangalore strategic petroleum reserve, at their own cost."

India imports more than 85% of its oil needs and has built strategic storages at three locations to store up to 5.33 million tonnes of oil as insurance against any supply disruption.

The idea behind leasing the storage to foreign companies was that they could store oil for sale to domestic refiners. But in case of an emergency, India held the first right on oil usage.

Strategic exception

UAE's Adnoc can now export crude oil from its Mangalore storage after the Centre's order on Saturday

- The Commerce ministry, however, said the condition of export being allowed only through IOC will continue
- India has built strategic storages to store up to 5.33 million tonnes of oil as insurance against supply disruption
- The idea behind leasing the storage to foreign companies was that they could store oil for sale to domestic refiners

MF small/mid-cap schemes in the red as market trembles

Suresh P. Iyengar
MUMBAI

The rout in the small and mid cap stocks so far this month has shaved off 2%-5% of investors' wealth in mutual fund schemes, following a tepid performance in February.

Small-cap stocks have been under pressure since market regulator SEBI expressed concern about froth in the space, with steady inflows in mutual fund schemes chasing select stocks and pumping up their valuations.

While all small-cap schemes are in the red so far this month, DSP Small Cap Fund's return was down 5% and that of Axis MF, HSBC MF, Canara Robaco MF and LIC MF schemes dipped 4% each.

But over the one-year period, these funds have delivered a return of 61% to 37% even as investors continue to book profit at frequent intervals.

Mid-cap mutual fund schemes were down by 3%-1% this month. Mirae Asset Midcap Fund and DSP Midcap Fund were down 3% each.

Mid-cap funds have given a return of 60%-37% due to strong inflows.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

Bima Sugam e-market among 8 regulations approved by IRDAI

The Hindu Bureau
HYDERABAD

The Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI) has approved eight regulations covering a clutch of crucial aspects, from policyholders interests, rural and social sector responsibilities of insurers, corporate governance, and one on the proposed insurance e-marketplace Bima Sugam.

As many as 34 regulations have been replaced with six regulations and two new regulations introduced, after a comprehensive review, to enhance clarity and coherence, the regulator said on Friday on the approvals granted at the 125th authority meeting in Hyderabad earlier this week.

On the IRDAI (Bima Sugam - Insurance Electronic Marketplace) Regulations, 2024, it said the aim was to establish a digital public infrastructure towards universalisation and democratisation of insurance in line with the 'Insurance for all by 2047' vision.

On the IRDAI (Insurance Products) Regulations, 2024, the regulator said six regulations had been merged into a unified framework and seek to promote good governance in product design and pricing, including strengthening of the principles governing guaranteed surrender value and special surrender value along with disclosures thereof.

The IRDAI (Rural, Social Sector, and Motor Third Party Obligations) Regulations, 2024, while consolidating existing norms, sets Gram Panchayat as the new unit of measurement for insurers' rural obligations and extends scope of social sector to cover cardholders and beneficiaries under various schemes.

Sugar production estimate revised up to 340 lakh tonnes

The Hindu Bureau
COIMBATORE

Sugar production till March 15 this season (which started on October 1, 2023) is 280.79 lakh tonnes, just about two lakh tonnes less than during the same period last season.

According to the Indian Sugar and Bio Energy Manufacturers Association (ISMA), the initial production projection of 330.5 lakh tonnes for the current sugar year is revised to 340 lakh tonnes. This is mainly because cane yields are higher than expected in Maharashtra and Karnataka.

While 371 mills are continuing operations this season, only 325 were functioning by this time last season. The Association said that since the crushing rate is low because of lower diversion to ethanol, the crushing capacity is curtailed and that is why a larger number of mills are functioning even now compared with last year.

ISMA has said that it wants to work closely with the government to find solutions to the challenges faced by the industry.

It is seeking measures to use the surplus B-heavy molasses and sugarcane juice for ethanol production and is also urging the government to take into consideration the economic implications of the surplus stock. The industry will face financial troubles if there is idle inventory.

Game start-up Skillmatics eyes ₹500 crore revenue

The Hindu Bureau
MUMBAI

Skillmatics, a toy and game company that develops play and learning experiences for children of all ages, is aiming to clock a revenue of ₹500 crore this financial year with a growth rate of 70% from last year, its founder and CEO Dhvanil Sheth said in an interaction.

"Our goal is to provide meaningful play experiences for children through the design of educational products and games. Currently, we offer around 200 products and are on track to achieve a revenue of ₹500 crore this year," he said.

'Adding new products every year has helped the company; all of them are made in India'

The U.S. accounts for 70% of the company's business, while 15% revenue comes from India and the U.K. is the largest among the remaining 15%.

Mr. Seth said the company expanded its presence to more than 20 countries, with three to four core nations driving its sales.

Adding new products every year has helped the company, while all of them are made in India, he said.

In 2021, the company created five new products. The next year, it added 20 new products and last year it created 50 more. "This year we are looking at 70 new products," Mr. Seth said.

"Our key differentiator is the inclusion of educational content into our products. This sets us apart from Chinese manufacturers, as our English-speaking workforce enables us to provide teaching quality that they lack," he added.

"Additionally, we surpass American competitors by leveraging our access to high-quality talent at a cost-effective rate," he further said.

Venu Srinivasan, kin execute MoU

G. Balachandar
CHENNAI

Venu Srinivasan, Chairman of TVS Holdings Ltd., and Chairman Emeritus of TVS Motor Company, announced that he and his family members had executed an MoU to avoid competition among themselves. The MoU covers the use of TVS brands and other associated areas as well.

"My family members [Mallika Srinivasan, Lakshmi Venu, and Sudarshan Venu] and I have executed an MoU dated March 20, and its execution was completed on March 21," he said in an exchange filing.

(The writer is with The Hindu businessline)

Stockholm technology firm Hexagon to ramp up its operations in India

Mini Tejaswi
BENGALURU

Hexagon, a Stockholm-based firm that focuses on technologies in autonomous and digital reality, has decided to ramp up its operations in India.

Currently, the €5.3 billion revenue firm has its largest global software and research and development facility in Hyderabad and going forward, the company will be diversifying into hardware systems in India to cater to various industries including automotive, oil & gas, power, aerospace, infrastructure, utilities, agriculture and defense, Navaneet Mishra, Senior VP & Head of Hexagon's R&D Centre in India told *The Hindu*.

Navaneet Mishra

"I am looking forward to diversifying our work to go beyond software development and solutioning to hardware system level programming in the near future," he said.

Mr. Mishra said Hexagon's R&D in India was the single largest such facility globally with more than 2,000 engineers, technologists and solution makers who are working on innovations in products and platforms. India was the hub to deliver R&D for all of Hexagon's business units.

"Over the last 10 years, Indian operations have grown in scale with a diversified talent pool and therefore aligning with Hexagon's global R&D vision."

75% of cars, 90% of aircraft and 85% of smartphones globally used Hexagon technologies, Mr. Mishra said. The company has delivered safer, reliable autonomous driving research vehicles than any other company, and more than 50% of all geospatial imaging and processing globally today happens on Hexagon's technologies, while more than a billion people are protected by Hexagon's public safety solutions, he added.

Commenting on the importance of digital twin technology in the automotive space, Mr. Mishra said the future of automotive manufacturing would be defined by the depth and precision of Digital Twin technologies. These twins would not only have to get precise dimensions and accurate placement of all parts, but they would must simulate all physical laws and material composition details for various scenarios, Mr. Mishra said.

"Such production will be much more cost-efficient by saving on material wastage and physical iterations, and environment friendly," he added.

INSPIRATION

Watching captain Dhoni in action has helped me learn a lot: Gill

VIJAY SONEJI

In his maiden captaincy sojourn, Shubman Gill wants to take inspiration from M.S. Dhoni. "I haven't played under Mahi *bhai*, but looking at the TV or from outside or when I have played against him at KKR and GT, there are some qualities I have picked up. If those help me in pressure situations, that would be fantastic."

IMPRESSIVE

Gavaskar lauds new skipper Ruturaj's captaincy against RCB

PTI

Sunil Gavaskar is mighty impressed with Chennai Super Kings' new captain Ruturaj Gaikwad. "Absolutely! Your debut as a captain becomes very important. You want to begin your captaincy career well with a win and that's exactly what happened. What was impressive was his bowling changes," Gavaskar told *Star Sports*.

KEEN STUDENT

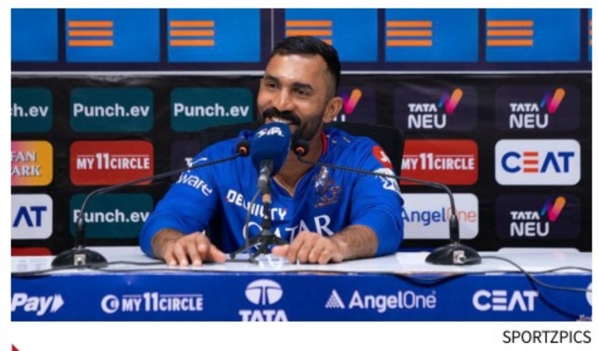
Dube learning the art of finishing games from the master

B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Shivam Dube says he relishes finishing the crunch games — an art he learnt by following the legendary M.S. Dhoni. "It was amazing. Finishing the game is something that amazes me. That's what I have learnt from Mahi *bhai*, and I try to do it every game," Dube said. "It feels very good when you finish the game like this."

***DIL MAANGE* MORE**

Karthik hopes CSK game was not his last game at Chepauk



SPORTZPICS

RCB's Dinesh Karthik was pragmatic when he was asked if he'd played his last IPL match at Chepauk after the CSK match on Friday. "It's a great question. I genuinely wish it's not, because I think the playoffs, last couple of games, could be here. So, if I come back for that, I guess that could be the last. Otherwise, I think it could be."

Curran and Livingstone hold their nerve to take Punjab Kings home

The Englishmen forge a match-winning stand of 67 off just seven overs for the fifth wicket; the southpaw benefits from a huge slice of luck; Porel's final flourish goes in vain; Pant comes undone while attempting too many unorthodox shots

IPL-17

M.R. Praveen Chandran
MULLANPUR

Sam Curran and Liam Livingstone failed to live up to their high price tags last season but on Saturday at the Maharaja Yadavindra Singh Stadium, the two Englishmen showed their value with a game changing partnership which saw Punjab Kings beat Delhi Capitals by four wickets.

Sam Curran enjoyed a huge slice of luck on 34 when Tristan Stubbs dropped him at long-on off Kuldeep Yadav. Curran made Capitals pay for the let off as he, along with Liam Livingstone (38 not out), added 67 for the fifth wicket off seven overs to put Kings on the road to victory.

The Delhi side's shoddy work on the field again allowed the match to slip through its hands as David Warner dropped Harpreet Brar off Khaleel Ahmed after the left-arm pacer had taken two wickets to give his side a glimmer of hope.

However, Livingstone took the side home, sending Sumit Sharma over long-on for a six to signal the win.

Ishant injured

Capitals was a bowler short after Ishant Sharma suffered an ankle injury.

Earlier, Impact Player Abhishek Porel made a big impact as he muscled his way to an unbeaten 10-ball 32 to give the Capitals innings the much-needed impetus. He went after Kings' death-over specialist Harshal Patel as the Rishabh Pant-led team finished at a competitive total of 174 for nine.

Pant's much-anticipated comeback, however, ended in a whimper. Though he was returning after a long layoff, the Capitals captain attempted unorthodox shots too early in his innings and fell to a ramp shot which ended in the hands of Bairstow at short square-leg.

After being put in, Capitals openers David Warner and Mitchell Marsh clattered boundaries off the erring Kings pacers to give their team a brisk start.

Arshdeep induced a false shot from Marsh to draw first blood. Warner continued to attack and struck Rabada for a six and a boundary to bring up the fifty for Capitals in the fifth over.

Left-arm spinner Harpreet Brar choked the flow of runs with a teasing spell. Rabada and Harshal picked up crucial wickets as Capitals lost their way before Porel provided a final flourish. Despite the bowlers' best efforts, Delhi couldn't stop Punjab from crossing the finish line.

Guiding force: Curran turned things around for Kings with a fluent knock. R.V. MOORTHY

SCOREBOARD

DELHI CAPITALS

David Warner c Jitesh b Harshal 29 *(21b, 3x4, 2x6)*, Mitchell Marsh c Rahul Chahar b Arshdeep 20 *(12b, 2x4, 2x6)*, Shai Hope c Brar b Rabada 33 *(25b, 2x4, 2x6)*, Rishabh Pant c Bairstow b Harshal 18 *(13b, 2x4)*, Ricky Bhui c Jitesh b Brar 3 *(7b)*, Tristan Stubbs c Shashank b Rahul Chahar 5 *(8b)*, Axar Patel run out 21 *(13b, 2x4, 1x6)*, Sumit Kumar c Jitesh b Arshdeep 2 *(9b)*, Abhishek Porel **(Impact Player in place of Bhui)** (not out) 32 *(10b, 4x4, 2x6)*, Kuldeep Yadav run out 1 (2b); Extras (lb-6, w-4): 10; Total (for nine wkts. in 20 overs): 174.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-39 (Marsh, 3.2 overs), 2-74 (Warner, 7.6), 3-94 (Hope, 10.4), 4-111 (Pant, 12.4), 5-111 (Bhui, 13.2), 6-128 (Stubbs, 15.4), 7-138 (Axar, 17.1), 8-147 (Sumit, 18.3), 9-174 (Kuldeep, 19.6).

PUNJAB KINGS BOWLING

Curran 1-0-10-0, Arshdeep 4-0-28-2, Rabada 4-0-36-1, Brar 3-0-14-1, Rahul Chahar 4-0-33-1, Harshal 4-0-47-2.

PUNJAB KINGS

Shikhar Dhawan b Ishant 22 *(16b, 4x4)*, Jonny Bairstow run out 9 *(3b, 2x4)*, Prabhsimran Singh (**Impact Player in place of Arshdeep**) c Warner b Kuldeep 26 *(17b, 5x4)*, Sam Curran b Khaleel 63 *(47b, 6x4, 1x6)*, Jitesh Sharma st. Pant b Kuldeep 9 *(9b, 1x4)*, Liam Livingstone (not out) 38 *(21b, 2x4, 3x6)*, Shashank Singh c Pant b Khaleel 0 *(1b)*, Harpreet Brar (not out) 2 (2b); Extras (lb-2, w-6): 8; Total (for six wkts. in 19.2 overs): 177.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-34 (Dhawan, 3.1), 2-42 (Bairstow, 3.5), 3-84 (Prabhsimran, 9.2), 4-100 (Jitesh, 11.3), 5-167 (Curran, 18.3), 6-167 (Shashank, 18.4).

CAPITALS BOWLING

Khaleel 4-0-43-2, Ishant 2-0-16-1, Marsh 4-0-52-0, Axar 4-0-25-0, Kuldeep 4-0-20-2, Sumit 1.2-0-19-0.

Toss: Punjab Kings; **PoM:** Curran.
PBKS won by four wickets with four balls to spare.

Next assignment

PBKS: March 25 vs. **RCB** Bengaluru, 7.30 p.m.

DC: March 28 vs. **RR** Jaipur, 7.30 p.m.

Klaasen returns in kind to Russell's blitz, but KKR snatches a humdinger

Y.B. Sarangi
KOLKATA

A fit-looking Andre Russell's exceptional all-round showing – a quickfire unbeaten half-century and two wickets – enabled Kolkata Knight Riders to beat Sunrisers Hyderabad by four runs and start its campaign brightly in the Indian Premier League at the Eden Gardens here on Saturday.

Put in, KKR powered to a formidable 208 for seven and restricted SRH – propelled by Heinrich Klaasen's near single-handed assault for a 29-ball 63 with eight sixes – to 204 for seven in a nail-biting finish to begin Holi celebrations early for thousands of home fans.

SRH openers Mayank Agarwal (32) and Abhishek Sharma (32), who escaped twice, gave the team a fine start, collecting 60 runs inside six overs. Harshit Rana and Russell removed Mayank and Abhishek respectively to apply the brakes.

KKR employed its spinners well in the middle overs. With the asking rate mounting, Varun Chakravarthy accounted for Aiden Markram, while Narine claimed Rahul Tripathi, who was dropped on five.

Russell dismissed Abdul Samad but Klaasen's awe-inspiring strokeplay kept SRH in the hunt.

Young pacer Harshit scalped two, including Klaasen, in the last over to stop SRH.

Earlier, Phil Salt (54, 40b, 3x4, 3x6) at the top and Russell (64 n.o., 25b, 3x4, 7x6) down the order scripted the host's superb fightback from a tight spot on a good batting surface.

Salt proved his worth as he hammered Marco Jansen for three consecutive sixes, including two over point and one over extra-cover, in the second over to take KKR to 43 for three in the PowerPlay.

Soon it was 51 for four. Fearless Punjab batter Ramandeep Singh rattled 35 in quick time and added 54 with Salt in 29 deliveries.

Salt, who picked his areas on both sides and held one end when needed, achieved his half-century before being spectacularly held in square-leg by Jansen off Markande.

Known for his trademark power-hitting, Russell, who rode his luck as a catch off Markande was disallowed in the 16th over, was at his best.

In his blazing knockthe West Indian swung his arms to give the KKR run-rate a significant push. He added 81 in only 33 balls with Rinku Singh.

Going hammer and tongs: Russell and Klaasen regaled the audience with some spectacular hitting. K.R. DEEPAK

SCOREBOARD

KOLKATA KNIGHT RIDERS

Phil Salt c Jansen b Markande 54 *(40b, 3x4, 3x6)*, Sunil Narine run out 2 *(4b)*, Venkatesh Iyer c Jansen b Natarajan 7 *(5b, 1x4)*, Shreyas Iyer c Cummins b Natarajan 0 *(2b)*, Nitish Rana c Tripathi b Markande 9 *(11b, 1x4)*, Ramandeep Singh c Markande b Cummins 35 *(17b, 1x4, 4x6)*, Rinku Singh c Markram b Natarajan 23 *(15b, 3x4)*, Andre Russell (not out) 64 *(25b, 3x4, 7x6)*, Mitchell Starc (not out) 6 *(3b, 1x4)*; Extras (nb-2, w-6): 8; Total (for seven wkts. in 20 overs): 208.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-23 (Narine, 1.6 overs), 2-32 (Venkatesh, 3.3), 3-32 (Shreyas, 3.5), 4-51 (Nitish, 7.3), 5-105 (Ramandeep, 12.1), 6-119 (Salt, 13.5), 7-200 (Rinku, 19.1).

SUNRISERS BOWLING

Bhuvneshwar 4-0-51-0, Jansen 3-0-40-0, Natarajan 4-0-32-3, Cummins 4-0-32-1, Markande 4-0-39-2, Shahbaz 1-0-14-0.

SUNRISERS HYDERABAD

Mayank Agarwal c Rinku b Harshit 32 *(21b, 4x4, 1x6)*, Abhishek Sharma (**Impact Player in place of Natarajan**) c Varun b Russell 32 *(19b, 4x4, 2x6)*, Rahul Tripathi c Harshit b Narine 20 *(20b, 1x6)*, Aiden Markram c Rinku b Varun 18 *(13b, 2x4)*, Heinrich Klaasen c Suyash b Harshit 63 *(29b, 8x6)*, Abdul Samad c Venkatesh b Russell 15 *(11b, 1x4, 1x6)*, Shahbaz Ahmed c Shreyas b Harshit 16 *(5b, 1x4, 2x6)*, Marco Jansen (not out) 1 *(1b)*, Pat Cummins (not out) 0 *(1b)*; Extras (lb-1, w-6): 7; Total (for seven wkts. in 20 overs): 204.

FALL OF WICKETS

1-60 (Mayank, 5.3), 2-71 (Abhishek, 7.2), 3-107 (Markram, 11.4), 4-111 (Tripathi, 12.5), 5-145 (Samad, 16.5), 6-203 (Shahbaz, 19.3), 7-204 (Klaasen, 19.5).

KNIGHT RIDERS BOWLING

Starc 4-0-53-0, Harshit 4-0-33-3, Varun 4-0-55-1, Narine 4-0-19-1, Russell 2-0-25-2, Suyash (**Impact Player in place of Ramandeep**) 2-0-18-0.

Toss: SRH; **PoM:** Russell.
KKR won by four runs.

Next assignment

SRH: March 27 vs. **MI** Hyderabad, 7.30 p.m.

KKR: March 29 vs. **RCB** Bengaluru, 7.30 p.m.

Chennai Super Kings reaped the rewards of its smart picks at the auction table

S. Dipak Ragav
CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings couldn't have asked for a better start to its 2024 IPL campaign after a comprehensive win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru in the opening game on Friday.

The victory followed the Super Kings' tried-and-tested template of using spinners to choke the runs, complemented by its batters' aggressive approach looking for boundaries throughout the innings.

More importantly, the success validated the team's brilliant auction strategy as three debutants made a telling impact.

With opener Devon Conway and pacer Matheesha Pathirana unavailable, their replacements – Rachin Ravindra and Mustafizur Rahman – stepped up to the task immediately.

Left-arm pacer Mustafizur (four for 29) set things up first with his double twin strikes in his first two overs that left RCB tottering at 78 for five. From there, the visitors had to be content with just a par score. The defending champion got the Bangladeshi pacer at a base price of ₹2 crore and it was one of the best buys.

After the auction in December 2023, Indian cricketer R. Ashwin praised the signing, saying the 28-year-old could be lethal on the grippy surfaces in Chepauk with his cutters and it proved prescient.

The 'Fizz' flummoxed Faf du Plessis, Virat Kohli and Cameron Green with his cutters and was proved hard to get away.

Then Ravindra, another steal at the auction for just ₹1.8 crore, set up the chase brilliantly with his 15-ball 37. The stylish left-hander kept things simple, hitting it on the rise with pulls and flicks to immediately put RCB under the pump.

Mitchell delivers

Later, Daryl Mitchell showed what he could do with his cameo knock and why the team splurged ₹14 crore to pick him. The Kiwi took just a few balls before lofting leg-spinner Karn Sharma straight down the ground for consecutive sixes to keep the momentum through the middle overs.

Though it is early days, well begun is half-done and Super Kings can feel good about their homework paying off.

Meanwhile, Pathirana has joined the squad while Mustafizur will be available only till April 30 owing to national duty.

Value for money: CSK's new players Mustafizur and Ravindra proved their worth in the team's victory. B. JOTHI RAMALINGAM

Battle on: Come Sunday, a regal Gill against a tearaway Bumrah promises to provide a gripping contest. VIJAY SONEJI

Gill takes strike as GT captain, Hardik begins lead role at MI

The Gujarat outfit has reposed faith in the 24-year-old; the Mumbai side will miss the services of star batter Suryakumar; it will be interesting to see how Rohit, without the responsibility of helming the team, goes about his business

IPL-17

N. Sudarshan
AHMEDABAD

When Gujarat Titans punted on Hardik Pandya as skipper during its inaugural season in 2022, there were many raised eyebrows.

But he proved all naysayers wrong by winning the title and was soon deemed good enough to helm the national team.

On Sunday, when GT takes on Mumbai Indians in its 2024 season-opener at the Narendra Modi Stadium here, it will hope that a second such bet, this time on Shubman Gill, proves as successful.

The 24-year-old Gill's biggest test will be to cover for the absence of Hardik and Mohammed Shami.

Creative solution

Afghan Azmatullah Omarzai is expected to do Hardik's job, but for that, GT has to find a creative solution to fill its overseas slots.

Rashid Khan and David Miller are sure-shot starters and there is Kane Williamson, Noor Ahmad, Josh Little and the ₹10 crore Aussie pacer Spencer Johnson.

Left-arm spinner R. Sai Kishore (53 wickets in the Ranji Trophy) gives GT a solid Indian option while Umesh Yadav has the arduous task of ensuring Shami is not missed.

MI's new leader Hardik also has a headache, for he will be without star batter Suryakumar Yadav.

But Jasprit Bumrah's return is a shot in the arm, and if Ishan Kishan can dispel the gloom that has seemingly enveloped his career at present, MI will be relieved.

There is also Tilak Varma, who between the last edition and now has made his India debut.

In Rohit Sharma, the side has its guiding light.

Of late, his batting in white-ball cricket has been thrill-a-minute.

A further unshackling, without captaincy responsibilities, will be a sight to behold.

Today's matches

Rajasthan Royals vs Lucknow Super Giants	Gujarat Titans vs Mumbai Indians
Jaipur, 3.30 p.m.	**Ahmedabad,** 7.30 p.m.
HEAD-TO-HEAD	HEAD-TO-HEAD
Played: 3	Played: 4
RR 2 | LSG 1	GT 2 | MI 2
PREVIOUS MEETING	PREVIOUS MEETING
LSG won by 10 runs, 2023	GT won by 62 runs, 2023

LIVE ON STAR SPORTS 1 (SD & HD) & JIO CINEMA

Royals and Super Giants ready to lock horns

Star cast: Rahul and Jaiswal will look to play big roles in Super Giants and Royals' campaigns. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

P.K. Ajith Kumar
JAIPUR

The cool breeze blowing across the Sawai Mansingh Stadium is rather a relief on this scorching Saturday afternoon. At the nets, Jos Buttler is taking on Avesh Khan.

Buttler is one of Rajasthan Royals' most familiar faces, having joined the franchise in 2018, but Avesh is sporting pink for the first time, after being traded by Lucknow Super Giants for Devdutt Padikkal.

Interestingly, Royals is taking on his former team in the first game for both the sides in Season 17 of the IPL.

For the moment, he is involved in an interesting battle at the nets. Soon after being lofted over long-off area by England's white-ball captain, Avesh forces a thick outside edge. A little later, Yashasvi Jaiswal, who has proved such a wise investment for Royals, walks in.

Buttler and Jaiswal are one of the most explosive and gifted opening pairs in the IPL. Jaiswal rarely puts a foot wrong these days, while Buttler has been one of the league's most successful batters.

Captain Sanju Samson, Dhruv Jurel, Shimron Hetmyer, Rovman Powell make it a formidable batting line-up.

In the exceptional spin duo of R. Ashwin and Yuzvendra Chahal and the experienced seamer Trent Boult, the bowling looks balanced.

For LSG, the absence of the English pacers Mark Wood and David Willey may be a setback, but the West Indies quick Shamar Joseph's is among the season's most awaited debuts.

Skipper K.L. Rahul, who is returning from injury, Quinton de Kock, Nicholas Pooran and Kyle Mayers promise runs aplenty.

We have all bases covered, feel Umesh can do the job for us in Shami's absence: Gill

N. Sudarshan
AHMEDABAD

In his first pre-match press briefing as Gujarat Titans captain, Shubman Gill started gingerly before coming into his own.

After the expected questions on Hardik Pandya's move away and Mohammed Shami's absence, he was pointedly asked what was different in this season's IPL.

"Look at the captains' photo with the trophy," Gill said, ahead of the contest against Mumbai Indians. "That's how different it is."

One of four

Gill is one of four new captains this edition, and will be eager to show that his blossoming career has another dimension to it.

Key personnel: Titans will hope that Tewatia, with the bat, and Rashid Khan, with his spin wizardry, deliver the goods against Mumbai Indians. VIJAY SONEJI

"It is fantastic to captain a team at a ground I have fond memories," he said. "

It is an exciting start to my journey. Facing Mumbai Indians, a five-time champion, at our home ground with 120,000 people will be pretty exciting."

While acknowledging that Titans would miss Hardik and Shami, the 24-year-old was confident in the overall strength of his outfit.

> As a senior player, having gained international experience, there's bigger responsibility on me this season
>
> **TILAK VARMA**
> Mumbai Indians

"In a team sport, if you are just looking at two players to get the job done, it means as a team, as a coach or a scout you have not done your job. We have all bases covered.

"Shami *bhai* is injured unfortunately, but Umesh [Yadav] *bhai* is a great bowler and I think he can do the job for us."

All the 'keepers fitting in the team is a good problem to have: Samson

P.K. Ajith Kumar
JAIPUR

Sanju Samson would rather keep wicket. There may be other options for Rajasthan Royals, like Dhruv Jurel and Jos Buttler, but he believes he gets a better view of the action as captain from behind the stumps.

"All the 'keepers fitting in the eleven or twelve is a good problem to have," Samson said at a press conference on the eve of Rajasthan Royals' first match of the season (against Lucknow Super Giants on Sunday). "Three of us have been doing keeping and fielding sessions during training."

About Adam Zampa pulling out at the last minute, he said it was a good opportunity for his replacement Tanush Kotian.

All in readiness: Rajasthan Royals players hone their skills at a training session. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

"We have been tracking him for the last couple of seasons," Samson said.

The skipper is expecting a lot from the man of the moment in the Royals team, Yashasvi Jaiswal. "His best phase is yet to come," he said. "There is a lot more in Yashasvi that we are yet to see."

LSG's new assistant coach Lance Klusener said though he was not a fan of the IPL's Impact Player rule, it was a nice innovation. "To get that call right is a challenge for the coach," said the former South African all-rounder.

Fresh start

Gearing up: Mumbai Indians skipper Hardik Pandya will be keen to lead from the front. VIJAY SONEJI

Mustafizur's bowling is suited to the nature of the pitches at Chepauk, says Simons

S. Prasanna Venkatesan
CHENNAI

Chennai Super Kings (CSK) bowling consultant Eric Simons said Bangladesh left-arm pacer Mustafizur Rahman brings something different with his left-arm angle and his bowling is suited to the nature of the pitches at the Chepauk.

Asked for the logic in the signing of Mustafizur, Simons said: "We would like a left-armer.

"That was obviously something we've worked with for a while now – to have somebody who does something a little bit different, the angle that he comes in at. But we just felt that he does suit the conditions (at Chepauk)."

> We would like a left-armer. That was obviously something we've worked with for a while now
>
> **SIMONS**

Mustafizur starred with four for 29 in CSK's six-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) here on Friday.

RCB's Dinesh Karthik appreciated Mustafizur's bowling, especially on an atypical Chepauk pitch.

"This is a very good pitch. It's not the usual slowish Chepauk turner that we probably are visualising in our mind. The ball skidded on a lot more. It was good for batting. I thought he bowled brilliantly.

"He bowled in three spells and in all three, he showed his skill. He's bowling a lot quicker than what he normally does. That's great for him, personally. And he hit the right lengths. His slow ball came out well.

"What makes it really tough is the fact that he can bowl at 138-139kmph and then he has a slower one which is very deceptive.

"And he bowls it at 120-125kmph which makes it really hard to line him up," Karthik said.

Strike force: Mustafizur starred with a four-for as Super Kings began their title defence in style. M. VEDHAN

INBRIEF

Pacers and Karunaratne give Sri Lanka control

Dimuth Karunaratne scored a patient half-century to guide Sri Lanka to 119 for five in the second innings on Saturday, building a 211-run lead against Bangladesh at stumps on the second day of the first Test at Sylhet.

The scores: Sri Lanka 280 & 119/5 in 36 overs (Dimuth Karunaratne 52, Dhananjaya de Silva batting 23) vs Bangladesh 188 in 51.3 overs (Taijul Islam 47, Liton Das 25, Fernando 4/48, Rajitha 3/56, Kumara 3/31).

Argentina downs El Salvador in a friendly without Messi

The absence of captain Lionel Messi due to injury didn't slow down Argentina on Friday as the world champion warmed up for its Copa America title defence with a 3-0 friendly victory over El Salvador in Philadelphia. Defender Cristian Romero opened the scoring in the 16th minute with Enzo Fernandez in the 42nd and Giovani Lo Celso in the 52nd completing the victory.

Ahmed Faiz scores FC Bengaluru United's winner

A late goal from Ahmed Faiz gave FC Bengaluru United (FCBU) a 2-1 win over Maharashtra Oranje FC in the I-League 2 football tournament at the Padukone-Dravid Centre for Sports Excellence in Bengaluru on Saturday. Maharashtra Oranje FC took the lead through L. Aashish's goal in the first half. Ashley Alban Kohli found the net to pull FCBU level, before Faiz struck gold. With 16 points from seven outings, FCBU sits on top of the points table.

The result: FC Bengaluru United 2 (Ahmed Faiz 87, Ashley Alban Kohli 64) bt Maharashtra Oranje FC 1 (L. Aashish 35).

Arjun and Jeevan in Challenger final

Arjun Kadhe and Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan beat Francisco Cabral and Henrique Rocha of Portugal 6-4, 7-6(4) in the doubles semifinals of the €74,825 Challenger tennis tournament in Murcia, Spain.

The results: €74,825 Challenger, Murcia, Spain: Doubles (semifinals): Arjun Kadhe & Jeevan Nedunchezhiyan bt Francisco Cabral & Henrique Rocha (Por) 6-4, 7-6(4).

Former PCB chairman Shaharyar Khan passes away

Shaharyar Khan, a career diplomat and former Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) chairman who played a big role in restoring cricket ties with India in the early 2000s, passed away on Saturday aged 89. The Bhopal-born Pakistan diplomat, who was a cousin of former India captain Mansur Ali Khan Pataudi, breathed his last here after battling prolonged illness. Shaharyar headed the PCB from 2003 to 2006, a period when India toured Pakistan twice, and from 2014 to 2017.

First National Open Relay Carnival in Chandigarh today

Some of the country's top sprinters will be in action in the first National Open Relay Carnival which will be held at the Sports Complex, Sector 7, Chandigarh, on Sunday. Competitions for men and women and for under-20 athletes in the 4x100m, 4x400m and in the 4x400m mixed relays will be held in the one-day meet organised by the Chandigarh Athletics Association under the aegis of the Athletics Federation of India.

LIVE TELECAST

NBA: Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 7.30 a.m.
Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka: 1st Test, day 3, FanCode, 9.30 a.m.
Formula One: Australian GP, F1 TV, F1 TV Pro App & FanCode, 9.30 a.m.
Badminton: Swiss Open, Sports 18-1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 3.30 p.m.
IPL: Star Sports 1 (SD & HD) & Jio Cinema App, 3.30 & 7.30 p.m.

Srikanth storms into the semifinals

The Indian makes his first final-four appearance in 16 months; Kiran and Priyanshu bow out in the quarterfinals

Smooth sailing: Srikanth was hardly stretched by Chinese Taipei's Chia. FILE PHOTO

SWISS OPEN

Press Trust of India
BASEL

Star shuttler K. Srikanth emerged as the lone Indian survivor at the Swiss Open Super 300 badminton tournament when he progressed to the semifinals with a straight game win over Chinese Taipei's Chia Hao Lee here.

Playing his eighth tournament this season, Srikanth finally got some momentum as he made his first final-four appearance in 16 months with a 21-10, 21-14 win on Friday.

He last played a semifinal at Hylo Open in November 2022.

Srikanth, a 2021 world championships silver medallist, will next face Chinese Taipei's World No. 22 Lin Chun-Yi on Saturday.

In another quarterfinal, Kiran George lost 23-21, 17-21, 15-21 to Denmark's Rasmus Gemke. Priyanshu Rajawat found Chou Tien Chen too hot to handle, going down 15-21, 19-21 in a 43-minute clash at the St. Jakobshalle stadium.

The results: Quarterfinals:
Men: K. Srikanth bt Chia Hao Lee (Tpe) 21-10, 21-14;
Kiran George lost to Rasmus Gemke (Den) 23-21, 17-21, 15-21;
Priyanshu Rajawat lost to Chou Tien Chen (Tpe) 15-21, 19-21.

Chhetri set for 150th international cap, to be feted by AIFF

Captain... Leader... Legend: Chhetri gets a rousing reception as he arrives in Guwahati for his landmark game. ANI

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Nearly two decades after he made his senior debut against Pakistan, India's talisman Sunil Chhetri is set for another milestone as he will appear in his 150th international match in the World Cup qualifier against Afghanistan at Guwahati on Tuesday.

India played out a goalless draw against Afghanistan in its away leg contest as they climbed to second in Group A in the second round of the 2026 FIFA World Cup qualifiers.

By achieving the feat, Chhetri will become the 40th player in the world to play 150 or more international matches in the list led by Portuguese superstar Cristiano Ronaldo (205).

Chhetri first donned the senior National jersey on June 12, 2005, in a friendly against Pakistan in Quetta.

He was India's scorer in the 1-1 draw. Since then, he has made 149 appearances for the National team, netting a record 93 goals.

A prolific goal-getter, the 39-year-old holds the unique record of scoring at least one goal in his first, 25th, 50th, 75th, 100th and 125th match for the Blue Tigers.

"It's been an awe-inspiring and staggering cruise that all of us have been fortunate to witness since 2005," said All India Football Federation (AIFF) president Kalyan Chaubey in a press release.

"Chhetri playing his 150th international match is an extraordinary accomplishment that will go a long way in keeping the Indian football flag flying high.

"He has been a great influencer who has motivated millions to play this beautiful game.

"I congratulate Chhetri for reaching this great height in international football," he added.

The AIFF also announced that they will felicitate the Indian star on the sidelines of their return leg clash against Afghanistan in Guwahati.

Uttarakhand and Delhi pugilists dominate in sub-junior Nationals

BOXING

Sports Bureau
GREATER NOIDA

Boxers from Uttarakhand and Delhi dominated the boys and girls sections respectively in the pre-quarterfinals of the third sub-junior National championships here with five boys from Uttarakhand and six girls from Delhi reaching the last-eight.

Uttarakhand's Aditya Mehra registered a RSC (referee-stops-contest) win in round one against Ansh of Haryana in the 35kg category.

He is one of five from the state to make the last-eight, others being Pratham Chand (40kg), Prajwal Singh Bhandari (49kg), Naitik Prasad (58kg) and Yash Kapri (70+kg) with all barring Pratham winning by RSC.

Four each from Andhra Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Manipur also advanced.

For Delhi, Arti Kumar (33kg) led the charge in the girls' category with a RSC win over Gujarat's Lisa in round one. Priyanjali (46kg), Kaynat (64kg), Siya (37kg), Ahaana Sharma (49kg) and Sarika Yadav (52kg) were the others from Delhi to advance.

Gold for Tajinderpal; Harshita upsets Tanya

Sports Bureau

Tajinderpal Singh Toor, the Asian record holder and Asian and Asian Games champion, won the men's shot put gold in the Indian Open Throws Meet at Patiala on Friday.

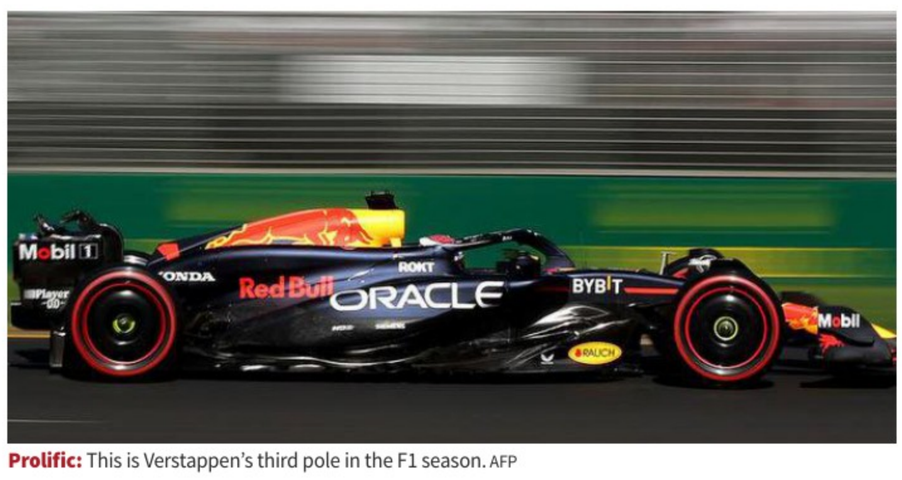
Delhi's Harshita Sehrawat produced a personal best as she won the women's hammer title.

The results:

Men: **Shot put**: 1. Tajinderpal Singh Toor (Pun) 19.82m, 2. Dhanveer Singh (Pun) 18.74, 3. Prabhkirpal Singh (Pun) 18.04.

Women: **Hammer**: 1. Harshita Sehrawat (Del) 59.78m, 2. Tanya Chaudhary (UP) 57.36, 3. Anmol Kaur (Pun) 55.47.

U-20: Women: Hammer: 1. Haqikat Grewal (Pun) 50.33m, 2. Anushka Yadav (UP) 49.71, 3. Ripudaman Kaur (Pun) 46.55.



Prolific: This is Verstappen's third pole in the F1 season. AFP

Verstappen takes pole position at Albert Park

AUSTRALIAN GP

Reuters
MELBOURNE

Red Bull's Formula One world champion Max Verstappen took pole position for the Australian Grand Prix on Saturday with Carlos Sainz qualifying alongside on the front row for Ferrari, two weeks after undergoing surgery for appendicitis.

Verstappen's team mate Sergio Perez qualified third but will start sixth after stewards imposed a three-place grid penalty for impeding Haas's Nico Hulkenberg in the first session of qualifying.

That promoted both McLaren drivers, with Lando Norris to start third and Oscar Piastri fifth behind Ferrari's Charles Leclerc.

Verstappen had bemoaned handling problems through practice but put together a sizzling lap of one minute, 15.915 seconds at Albert Park to be 0.27 seconds clear of Sainz.

"It was a bit unexpected today in qualifying, but very happy with Q3," said the triple world champion, who won the race last year after his maiden pole at Albert Park.It was a tough afternoon for Mercedes, with seven-time world champion Lewis Hamilton suffering his worst qualifying at Albert Park in over a decade.

Hamilton failed to make the third session of qualifying (Q3) and will start 11th on the grid, his worst result at Albert Park since qualifying 11th in the 2010 race.

Fernando Alonso had to abort his first lap in Q3 after a skid through gravel at turn six and qualified 10th, behind Aston Martin team mate Lance Stroll.

The starting grid:
Front row: Max Verstappen (Red Bull), Carlos Sainz (Ferrari); **second row:** Lando Norris (McLaren), Charles Leclerc (Ferrari); **3rd row:** Oscar Piastri (McLaren), Sergio Perez (Red Bull); **4th row:** George Russell (Mercedes), Yuki Tsunoda (RB); **5th row:** Lance Stroll (Aston Martin), Fernando Alonso (Aston Martin).
6th row: Lewis Hamilton (Mercedes), Alexander Albon (Williams); **7th row:** Valtteri Bottas (Sauber), Kevin Magnussen (Haas); **8th row:** Esteban Ocon (Alpine), Nico Hulkenberg (Haas); **9th row:** Pierre Gasly (Alpine), Daniel Ricciardo (RB); **10th row:** Zhou Guanyu (Sauber).

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